

**1 DEVELOPING AN ECOSYSTEM OF COCA COMMUNICATIONS:**

**INTRODUCING CAST, SETTING AND PLOT**



**FIGURE 2: Yungas community with coca drying on the ground.**  
(Photo by author, April 2005).

There is thus an economic and political side to the formation of idea-systems, and idea-systems, once produced, become weapons in the clash of social interests. Sets of ideas and particular group interests, however, do not exist in mechanical one-to-one relationships. If a mode of production gives rise to idea-systems, these are multiple and often contradictory. They form an 'ecology' of collective representations, and the construction of ideology takes place within a field of ideological options in which groups delineate their positions in a complex process of selection among alternatives. This process of inclusion and exclusion is not only cognitive; it also involves the exercise of power. To sustain ideological hegemony, the defenders of orthodoxy must carry their message into an ever larger number of instrumental domains, while curtailing the ability of subaltern groups to advance viable alternatives. Where redundancy falters and ideology-making fails, the deficit may be made up by force.

(Eric R. Wolf 1982:390)

## Introduction: Where and Who?

When you find that your community's public toilet was the product of a joint effort between three different European and North American countries and two sparring organisations in your country's capital city, you know it is no longer possible to think about bounded social systems. Anthropologist Alexander Lesser wrote in 1961, that we must 'conceive of human societies... not as closed systems, but as open systems... (and) of any social aggregate not as isolated, separated by some kind of wall, from others, but as inextricably involved with other aggregates, near and far, in weblike, netlike connections' (Lesser 1985:92; cf. Geertz 1963; Mintz 1985; Wolf 1982). This is the story of a cast of interconnected characters that includes the users of the toilet, the administrators of the toilet and the donors of the funding for the toilet. Of course, this is a hypothetical toilet. No such toilet exists. Or rather, many such toilets exist; toilets and schools and telecentres, the users, administrators and funders of which are linked in relationships of interdependence bound up in a larger political economy wrapped around time and space. This thesis asks questions about the power relations that inhere in such social, political, economic and historical interchanges, which have to do with the production of both material and cultural resources.

This story is set mainly in the Yungas of Bolivia, a series of sub-tropical valleys to the East of La Paz. These valleys are the petering out of the South American Andes, where the eternal snows morph into lush greenery and cascading waterfalls. Imagine Warita<sup>1</sup>, a little girl of eight, hanging her head out of the bus window and watching the scenery change as she enters these valleys with her parents for the first time. They are migrating from the harsh *altiplano*, where 'the people don't know money', to seek a better life. She will discover that the Yungas is a paradise of pleasant weather (the rainy season excepted), abundant chin-dripping mangoes, oranges, mandarines and coffee, among other delights. It is also an area where, after thousands of years, the coca leaf stubbornly, and much to the chagrin of the international community, continues to constitute the main source of livelihood for local people, and it is in search of this livelihood that Warita and her family have come. While Yungas coca is legal and destined for traditional domestic markets, the leaf's better-known derivative, of course, is cocaine.

I undertook ethnographic fieldwork in the Yungas for 20 months and was based during that time in Chulumani, the capital of Sud Yungas (South Yungas), spending time in several of the surrounding communities as well as in the nearby Irupana region. Chulumani is a town of around 2700 people (INE 2001) and sits on a steep slope at an altitude of around 1640m above sea level (Prefectura La Paz 2007). As typical of most Yungueñan towns, it has breathtaking views from every angle, and at only a four or five hour bus-trip from La Paz, it is perhaps only the constant threat of death, highlighted by the carcasses of ill-fated trucks and buses lining the valley floor, that deters more tourists from making this their holiday destination. The centre of town is marked by a leafy plaza

---

<sup>1</sup> Most names of people, communities and organisations are pseudonyms, for the purposes of anonymity.

and off the plaza runs the market, which springs to life every Saturday and Sunday as people from the surrounding communities converge to exchange goods and gossip, and children like Warita tug at their parents' sleeves, begging for something that has caught their eye. Chulumani is a cross-roads for travellers and traders who move endlessly between the different towns and communities of the region, making it also a communications cross-roads.

This story will begin, as should any good rite of passage ethnography, with my arrival in the field. Or rather, it will begin slightly before my arrival; in the air, somewhere between Buenos Aires and Cochabamba, Bolivia. It was the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2003, and the airports had just been reopened, things having 'normalised' after newly ex-President 'Goni' had fled northward in response to public outrage at his use of lethal force against civilians. As we flew, I occupied myself by trying to eavesdrop on the conversation of the man and woman seated behind me. The woman was blondish and plumpish; Latin American, wealthy, educated and keen to use her good English to impress the man. The man was fat and wore a baseball cap. He did not speak Spanish.

The woman had sent her son to study in the United States and spoke to the man enthusiastically as though they were a part of the same team, of the same class, of the same species. As we flew over it, she spoke about Bolivia as though it were not her country, but something she had a passing interest in. She spoke about the Bolivians as though she were not one of them. The conversation will always remain blurry (I was not yet in the habit of relentless note-taking), but I remember straining to hear as the woman turned the conversation casually to the 'coca problem' and the 'Indians'. 'But they *hate*,' I remember her saying over the humming of the engine. 'They hate. *We* have to teach them to love.'

What the woman had been doing on the plane was maintaining and reaffirming a discourse that separated her and the North American man (who were loving) from the 'Indians' (who were hateful). This discourse of separation is never absent from any interaction between 'Indians' and 'outsiders', even if a large part of it is being enacted in the minds of those 'Indians' themselves. As I would discover over the course of my fieldwork, development projects and development workers are not exempt from this, regardless of their perceived apoliticism or the good intentions of those involved, and working on the assumption that they *are* can be damaging.

In the pages that follow, I will outline the aims of this study and give a brief review of previous research undertaken in related fields, before describing the theoretical approach taken in this thesis. I will then give an overview of the content of the chapters of the thesis, and end with a discussion of the methodologies used in the research.

NOTE: This figure is included on page 5 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

**FIGURE 3: Map of Bolivia, showing the Yungas of La Paz.**  
(<http://campus.udayton.edu/mary//resources/stamps/map%20bolivia.jpg>)

NOTE: This figure is included on page 6 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

**FIGURE 4: Map of Chulumani and Irupana municipalities, with Chulumani *sub centrales***  
(Reproduced from Qhana and Pastoral n.d.:65).

## Aims, Focus and Justification for the Research: What and Why?

This thesis was motivated by a desire to understand the power exchanges that occur throughout the process of 'development', with a view to understanding how, on the most practical level, development projects might hold more relevance to the lives of their target groups than they have hitherto tended to do, but also, how the power imbalances that characterise these relationships may be understood and addressed. The word 'development' (*desarrollo*), for Yungas coca-growers, has a bitter taste as it rolls off their tongues, and brings back memories not only of economic hardship seen as a direct cause of past development projects, but also of disempowerment, subordination and a loss of autonomy. Don Alonso, a Yungas coca-grower asks, 'Why do they always aim (development projects) at the sector where we have coca?'<sup>2</sup> And then goes on:

We are always paternalised, we are manipulated, we are puppets for all those people.  
That is the worst misfortune of our people.

'Development' has been variously defined and had many guises over the past centuries, but if we adopt a notion of development that is largely bereft of cynicism and that encompasses the apolitical work of facilitating more comfortable and fulfilling lives for people, then 'development' work must nonetheless also pay attention to issues of power surrounding cultural and social production. As has been widely argued, poverty cannot simply be measured in terms of material assets, but is related also to issues of voice, participation, power, rights and independence (Narayan 2000; Narayan and Petesch 2002; Slater and Tacchi 2004).

It was not incidental that the reason for the civil uprising that had prompted the government to use violent force the week before I arrived in Bolivia was a disenchantment with the current way in which the country's natural resources, particularly hydrocarbons, were being used (Kohl and Farthing 2006:11). With multinational corporations reaping the gains and the Bolivian populace losing out, again, this was another refrain in the constant theme of struggle over natural or material resources that has plagued Bolivian-outsider relations across history. In the case of the Yungas coca-grower, the resource in question is, of course, coca. But accompanying these struggles there has always been an intertwined struggle over cultural resources; over the power to create, recreate or counter-discourses, meanings and values. In the case of the Yungas coca-growers, these discourses have had to do with the coca leaf, and with the people who produce, exchange and consume it. Development organisations today participate, unwittingly or not, in these power struggles over material and cultural resources.

---

<sup>2</sup> All translations of participants' words and of written works are my own unless otherwise noted. I have usually omitted the original Spanish to avoid lengthiness and only retained words that are of particular importance or that lose much in translation.

In addressing these concerns, I focus on the recent development 'solution'; the rush to connect communities that have been bypassed in the world communications network, with the aim of overcoming the 'digital divide' and with that, of contributing to the alleviation of poverty in its multiple forms, and of inequality within and between countries (Gigler 2001:37; Ribera 2003:4; Richardson 1997a:7; van der Krogt 2005:3). Using as case studies the examples of a local radio station, Radio Yungas, an Internet telecentre project and a proposed Wi-Fi Internet project for more remote communities, I point to the importance of working to understand the social and communicative systems of which the new Information and Communication Technology (ICT)<sup>3</sup> interventions are to become a part (both locally and more broadly). I argue that the communications system, which I will discuss according to the notion of *communicative ecology* (Tacchi et al. 2003a), is inextricably linked to the system of coca production, hence it is imperative also to understand that system, if communications for development projects, or indeed any development project, is to be of relevance to local people. I will also argue that development organisations must be reflexive about their own role within these communicative and social systems, and be mindful of the kinds of power struggles over both material and cultural resources, of which they become a part when they take on work in any given locality.

Concerns surrounding power issues within development are not by any means new, and have a long tradition within the critical literature, stemming back to the dependency theorists of the 1960s and 70s (Cardoso and Faletto 1979; Frank 1967; 1969; 1975; 1978; 1981; Nash 1979), to the proponents of World Systems Theory that envisaged a single world system made up of unequal parts with different modes or relations of production (Frank and Gills 1993; Hopkins and Wallerstein 1982; 1996), and theorists of unequal exchange (Emmanuel 1972), through to the participatory and 'alternative development' theorists (Chambers 1983; 1992; 1997; Cernea 1989; Nederveen Pieterse 2001), and poststructuralist development critics of the 1970s, 80s and 90s (Escobar 1984; Esteva 1992; Ferguson 1994; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Sachs 1992).

The participatory theorists pointed to the 'top-down' nature of most development projects and called for greater involvement of local people in projects as well as greater sensitivity toward cultural diversity, local knowledges and the local context (Cernea 1989; Chambers 1983; 1992; 1997; Freire 1972; 2006). The idea of 'Alternative Development' was also concerned with local knowledges and the relationship between culture and development (Hobart 1993; Nederveen Pieterse 1995; 2001; Radcliffe 2006; van der Ploeg 1993; Viola Recasens 2000:21-23), and focussed on the 'empowerment' of local people rather than production and growth (Arce and Long 2000; Bebbington 2000; Chambers 1989; Friedman 1992; Long 1992; 2001). New participatory methodologies were devised that soon became part of the development mainstream or what could be called a new development metanarrative (Chambers 1992; Freire 1972; Motteux et al. 1999;

---

<sup>3</sup> Writers rarely define exactly what they mean by the term ICTs, but it is often used synonymously with the term Internet (cf. Haseloff 2005). Some make the distinction between old and new ICTs (Galperin 2005; IICD 2005; van der Krogt 2005). I use the term to encompass both old and new information and communication technologies, meaning radio, telephone, mobile phone, print technologies, Internet, and so on.



Rahnema 1990). This elicited criticism that the participatory model was mere rhetoric (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Nederveen Pieterse 1998; 2001; Nyamwaya 1997) and further, that its genesis in ideas of Western-style democracy may mean that it would not be compatible with all cultural and social systems and had the potential to promote division and confusion within communities (Green 2002:67).

The poststructuralists or postdevelopment critics began to deconstruct the concept and practice of development itself and to look for alternatives (Apffel-Marglin and Marglin 1990; Dirks et al. 1994; Escobar 1984; 1988; 1991; 1992; 1995; Esteva 1992; Ferguson 1994; Gardner and Lewis 1996; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Hobart 1993; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997; Rew 1997; Sachs 1992; Schrijvers 1993). Many of these critics came from an anthropological tradition and were largely influenced by Michel Foucault's (1970; 1972; 1995) writings on discourse, power, knowledge and governmentality. At the same time, anthropologists began to ask questions about the power relations pertaining to their own involvement in development and the merits of exercising applied anthropology in development (Agrawal 1996; Crewe and Harrison 1998; Edelman and Haugerud 2005:2; Escobar, 1991; 1995; Little and Painter 1995; Sachs 1992).

Parallel to and embedded within these debates across the years, scholars and practitioners have asked questions about the power issues inherent in communications for development. Initially, in the tradition of modernisation theory, communication was simply understood according to a 'hypodermic' sender-receiver model (Lerner 1958; 1967; Schramm 1967; cf. Contreras Baspineiro 2000a:36-37; Morley 1992:45) or 'diffusion of innovations' model (Rogers 1962; 1971), whereby information was transmitted from a sender to a passive receiver. This would be achieved through the receiver's exposure to mass media (Pasquali 2006). Armand Mattelart critically described communication as operating according to a vertical information flow, such that:

A transmitter transmits the superstructure of the capitalist mode of production to an audience the great majority of which does not see its own preoccupations and modes of life reflected in the messages transmitted, but sees rather those values and norms which the ruling class consider to be the most favourable to its society.

(1980:41)

Latin American communication scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, often inspired by dependency theories, were influential in questioning and criticising such unilinear approaches to communication, seeing that communication could potentially play a strategic role in building democracy in their continent (cf. Tufte 2001b:28). As such, they highlighted issues of power involved with media ownership and control (Freire 1972; García Canclini 1987; Martín-Barbero 1997).<sup>4</sup> A part of this new paradigm included a shift toward thinking of communication as a bidirectional and horizontal

---

<sup>4</sup> See also Gumucio-Dagron's interview with Bolivian communications pioneer Luis Ramiro Beltrán (Gumucio-Dagron 2004b).

flow where the sender is also the receiver (Beltrán 2006b; Martín-Barbero 1982; 2002; Mattelart 1980; Mattelart and Mattelart 1992; Servaes 2007; Tufte 2001b), and where audiences have the capacity to utilise media in creative ways and to produce meanings and identities of their own (Ginsburg 1995; Harris 1995; Martín-Barbero 1999; 2004; Tufte 2006b). This saw the introduction of participatory processes involving the daily, local and community (Contreras Baspineiro 2000b:34), of which the Bolivian miners' radio stations (Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas 1984; Huesca 1995; Gumucio-Dagron 2001a; O'Connor 1990; 2004) and Radio Yungas (Anonymous n.d.; Camacho Azurdy 2000; Chambi Cari 1997; Contreras Baspineiro 1996; Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas 1984; ERBOL 1989) are two prime examples.<sup>5</sup>

As we have moved into what has been termed the 'Information Age' or 'Information Society' in reference to a world that is held together by unprecedentedly massive flows and transfers of information, facilitated by new technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones (Webster 2002:22), theorists such as Scott Lash (2002) and Manuel Castells (1996; 2004) have attempted to come to terms with these changes through ideas about networks and information flows and associated issues of power and exclusion. As a reaction to these global developments, some Latin American scholars are looking again to dependency theories and asking questions about existing structures of political, social and economic inequality (Torrico in CRIS Bolivia 2003:179; Gumucio-Dagron 2005:4; van Oeyen 2003:49). Colombian Fals Borda (2003:10) calls for communicators committed to an 'authentic progress and peace' to take up a renewed resistance against 'the warlike Orwellian contra-utopia that they send us from the North'. This resistance, he writes, will be found in the direct and constructive contact with our autonomous peoples and our ancestral reality (ibid.).

Concerns have been raised that the focus of debates surrounding the 'digital divide' needs to shift from issues of technology and connectivity per se, to the sociocultural and political issues associated with this (Martín-Barbero 2006:919; Córdova in CRIS Bolivia 2003:7; Beltrán in CRIS Bolivia 2003:179-180; CRIS Bolivia 2003:9; Gumucio-Dagron 2003:1; 2005:6; n.d.:1-2; van Oeyen 2003:51;). Gumucio-Dagron (2003:1) has written that the technology gap will inadvertently be closed because it is market driven, but the real underlying causes of inequality: social injustice, discrimination, corruption, unfair trade agreements, lack of services, poor education and inadequate health systems will remain unless development projects are sensitive to these issues. Bolivia's arm of the international organisation CRIS (Communication Rights in the Information Society) writes:

---

<sup>5</sup> A good example of an attempt to bridge the two apparently opposing paradigms of the 'diffusion of innovations' model (Rogers 1962; 1971) and the participatory communication approaches (Freire 1972) is South Africa's 'Soul City'. Tufte (2001b) writes how this entertainment-education-based multi-media initiative for social change achieves a successful combination of social marketing strategies, which were traditionally top-down and grew out of the 'diffusion of innovations' approach, with participatory components that 'promote dialogue, challenge power structures and promote community-based action' (ibid.:26). He cites Soul City as 'an innovative and sound example of a 'third way' (ibid.:28; cf. Tufte 2006a).

The Information and Communication Society that we must develop in Bolivia must be characterised by contributing to a society with human, sustainable development, with social justice and the elimination of poverty. The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) must be implemented in working towards this model of society, as a means and not an end.

(CRIS Bolivia 2003:164)

I enter the debate at this point, suggesting that it is necessary to take into account the wider social, political and economic processes in which a communications for development project is embedded, in order for it to contribute to 'development', rather than constituting an end in itself. A study of development communications in the Yungas region is able to highlight the usefulness of conceptualising local communicative systems as being both produced by and influencing the wider productive system of the area, because of the largely monoproduktive nature of this coca-growing area. The unusual way in which Yungas coca-growers are incorporated into the world system through their relationship with this crop also throws into stark relief the importance of paying attention to the political, social and economic processes that link local actors to a wider political economy, with the power relations that this entails (cf. Mintz 1985; Wolf 1982).

Whilst several scholars have made reference to 'Alternative Development' projects involving substitution of the coca leaf in the Yungas (Léons 1997, Spedding 1989; 2003; 2004; Spedding and Llanos 1999; Viola Recasens 1995)<sup>6</sup>, few studies have been undertaken on communications in the region. Studies focusing on Radio Yungas are confined to Chambi Cari's (1997) graduate thesis focusing on the radio station's relationship to coca and the scheduled alternative development programme Yungas 2000, a report by ERBOL<sup>7</sup> (1989), a brief history of the radio station by an unidentified author (Anonymous n.d) and two audience surveys conducted by the radio's administering non-governmental organisation (NGO) (Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas 1984; Contreras Baspineiro 1996). Camacho Azurdy (2000) also included Radio Yungas in his study of radio and citizenship along with a number of other Bolivian radio stations. Other studies on radio in Bolivia include Lazar (2002), Contreras Baspineiro (1999), Albó and d'Emilio (1990), who focus on intercultural bilingual education through radio, Moncada Ossorio (2002) who has studied educational radio in La Paz, and on the miners' radio stations, Gumucio-Dagron (2001a), Huesca (1995), Lozada and Kuncur (2004) and O'Connor (1990; 2004).

As the telecentre discussed in this study was the first to have opened in Chulumani, there have been no studies done on Internet or telecentres in this area that I am aware of at the time of writing, although many such studies have been undertaken in other parts of the world (Galperin 2005;

---

<sup>6</sup> Studies focussing on development projects aimed at coca substitution in other coca-growing regions include Aranibar and Alarcon (2002), Cano (2001), Decker Marquez (1990), Escobar, F (1990), Morales Nieto (1994), Rementería (1989) and Thoumi (2002).

<sup>7</sup> *Educación Radifónica de Bolivia* (Radio Education of Bolivia), a network of educational radio stations around Bolivia, of which Radio Yungas is a member.

Gómez and Martínez 2001; Katz and Rice 2002; Latchem and Walker 2001b; Miller and Slater 2000; Richardson 1997; Rivero Illa 2005; Warnock and Wickremasinghe 2005; Warschauer 1999). The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) (2001) have conducted a study on the state of the Internet in Bolivia, which was concerned with issues of connectivity and regulations.

I draw heavily on the ethnographic work of Alison Spedding (eg. 1994; 2004), an anthropologist who has worked and lived in the Chulumani area for over twenty years. Other scholars to have worked in the Yungas include Silvia Rivera (eg. 1994; 2001), Heath (1973), Lema (1997), Leons (1997) and Soux de Wayar (n.d.). Through this thesis, I aim to contribute to the knowledge already generated, by using thorough ethnographic methods to shed light on the particular life worlds of some of the people who are at the receiving end of communications for development projects, proposing an approach to communications for development that is concerned with conceptualising communications initiatives as part of a wider communicative system that is tied inextricably to material production systems.

## **Theoretical Underpinnings of the Thesis: How to Conceptualise the Problem**

### **The Ecology of Coca Communications**

As a way of grappling with the inextricable 'weblike, netlike' connectedness of human societies, near and far (Lesser 1985:92; cf. Wolf 1982:3), and of how to conceptualise the role of communications media within these webs, I employ the concept of 'communicative ecology'. The ecological metaphor has been used by various scholars, with a tradition of 'media ecology' said to have grown up around the work of McLuhan (1964; 1988; cf. Fuller 2005; Ong 1982; Postman 1985; 1993)<sup>8</sup>. Postman (1970:161) describes 'media ecology' as 'the study of media as environments' and of how these environments, their structure and content, impact on people as they interact with communications technology. Westerkamp (1994) wrote of 'acoustic ecology' in her study of radio, and Altheide (1994) has written of 'mapping the effective environment' of an 'ecology of communication.' For him, the merit of working with the concept of ecology lies in its implication of the relatedness of elements through 'process and interaction', of their 'interdependence, mutuality and co-existence', and of the 'developmental, contingent and emergent features of ecology' (ibid.:667). He writes, '...ecology does not exist as a 'thing', but is a fluid structure involving meaning' (ibid.).

Recently, the ecological concept has been applied in a communications for development context, with scholars working to devise ethnographic methods of studying the 'communicative ecologies' of

---

<sup>8</sup> In his study entitled *Media Ecologies*, Fuller (2005:2) writes, 'The term "ecology" is used here because it is one of the most expressive language currently has to indicate the massive and dynamic interrelation of processes and objects, beings and things, patterns and matter.'

which new ICTs become a part (Tacchi et al. 2003a; 2003b; Tacchi 2006; Nair et al. 2006; Hearn and Foth 2007a).<sup>9</sup> Slater writes:

...communicative ecology, as a methodological approach, is concerned to assemble the full range of (symbolic and material) communicative resources, and the (social and technical) networks into which they are organized, in order to identify communicative structures, constraints and potentials.

(2005:1)

The concept then aims to paint a broad and yet detailed picture of the whole socio-cultural context in which communication processes occur, and in this it differs from the media-centric standpoint of media ecology, which places emphasis on the way in which media themselves structure and influence our lives (Hearn and Foth 2007a:1). Communicative ecology is a useful framework for exploring the multifariousness of communicative avenues available for people to draw on in working to achieve their everyday aims, and the interconnectedness of these within a system (Tacchi et al. 2003a).

Hearn and Foth (2007a:1) write about different, separate communicative ecologies and of looking for ways to define boundaries between these ecologies, and between insiders and outsiders in the different ecologies. I would suggest in practice, however, that just as the problematic nature of the concept of bounded cultures or bounded social spheres is widely accepted in anthropology today (Lesser 1985:92; Geertz 1963; Mintz 1985; Wolf 1982), it is also problematic to speak of definable boundaries to a communicative ecology. Where people and groups are connected according to various social, political or economic criteria across geographical and social spaces, we might rather speak of an individual person's or group's differing situation or location (geographical or social) within one vast, in fact global, ecosystem (Appadurai 1996:41; Castells 1996; 2004; Lash 2002).<sup>10</sup>

In our studies, however, we must draw artificial boundaries in order to contain and effectively manage the study, as I do when I focus upon what becomes a sub-system of that global ecosystem, centred largely in a given locality (Appadurai 1996). A better illustration of the real nature of communicative flows may be to imagine a spotlight that lights up a spider's web in the night. As we move the torch across the web, a different part of the web, with its interconnecting and criss-crossing threads, is illuminated. At any one time, we see and focus on only the small section that is within the scope of our spotlight, all the while knowing that beyond our vision, the web extends infinitely. Keeping the metaphor pure, I will refer to 'communicative ecology' as the study of 'communicative ecosystems', in line with Martín-Barbero (2004) and Geertz, who writes that:

---

<sup>9</sup> A special issue of the *Electronic Journal of Communication*, edited by Hearn and Foth (2007b), was devoted to 'Communicative Ecologies' in 2007. See Allison (2007), Powell (2007) Shepherd et al. (2007) and Wilkin et al. (2007).

<sup>10</sup> Appadurai (1996:41) has described the world as 'one large, interactive system, composed of many complex subsystems'.

The concept of an ecosystem thus emphasizes the material interdependencies among the group of organisms which form a community and the relevant physical features of the setting in which they are found, and the scientific task becomes one of investigating the internal dynamics of such systems and the ways in which they develop and change.

(1963:9)

For human societies, the interdependencies go beyond the material, however, and it is here that I wish to make the point that the concept of communicative ecology on its own has little meaning without adopting a political economy approach, which incorporates the work of attempting to understand the social and power relations that surround the production, distribution and consumption of both material and cultural resources, the two of which are interrelated (Mintz 1985; Mosco 1996; Wolf 1982). In the spirit of Geertz (1963:9), who identifies the interrelation of Javanese rice terraces with modes of labour organisation, forms of village structure and processes of social stratification, I argue that the coca production system in the Yungas and the associated relations surrounding land ownership, labour, syndical organisation, exchange and consumption of the leaf, lays the basis for an 'ecosystem of coca communications'. Within the ecosystem, there exists a political economy of information exchange, distribution, production and consumption, and of inclusions and exclusions to these processes, which is interdependent with the political economy of coca.

### **The Political Economy of Coca Communications**

Vincent Mosco (1996:25) defines political economy as, 'the study of social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources,' where resources are for him the products of communication: books, videos, films, and audiences. Of course, these material products (paper in the form of a book, plastic in the form of a video) are merely vehicles for the non-material resources (cultural resources) that are the values and messages or discourses that they transport. These values and messages are consumed by the reader or watcher and adapted and mediated in their consumption. As part of this process, new meanings and values are produced, then to be exchanged with others. As such, trying to ascertain who possesses control over these processes at any one time becomes a challenge that it is the role of a political economy of communication to take up (cf. Hirst and Harrison 2007:30-51).

Nicholas Garnham (2006) has written, 'We could say that the purpose of a political economy of culture is to elucidate what Marx and Engels meant... by control of the means of mental production' (Garnham 2006:206; cf. Marx and Engels 2006:9), and describes the political economy of mass-communication as being situated within that wider framework 'as the analysis of an important, but

historically specific mode of the wider process of cultural production and reproduction' (Garnham 2006:202). Here, we can envisage a direct application of Marx and Engels' work, as put forward by Armand Mattelart who drew on Marx's *Capital* (Marx 1952) to apply to communication the idea of mode of production. He writes that Marx and Engels' theoretical concept of mode of production, which they applied only to the economic functioning of society and therefore to the production of material commodities, could however be applied beyond the material, to a 'social totality.'

...it is possible to use this concept not only for the economic structure of society, or according to Marx's terms, the overall relations of production established between individuals (serfdom, wage-earners), which corresponds to a definite phase in the development of productive forces (production tools, work methods and the workers who employ these methods), but also for the juridical and political superstructures that correspond to definite forms of social consciousness.

(Mattelart 1979:36)

Likewise, Durham and Kellner (2006:xxvii) write that political economy is not merely about economics, but also about the 'relations between the economic, political, technological, and cultural dimensions of social reality.' While not wishing to adhere to reductionist ideas of an ideological superstructure determinant on an economic base, I argue that the political economy of the mode of cultural production and that of the mode of material production are interdependent. What this means in practical terms is that the ability and authority of a person or group of people to access and use a particular communicative medium, as well as their effectiveness in contributing to the creation of discourse or cultural products to their own gain, depends upon that person's or group's position within the relations of material, in this case, coca production (cf. Durham and Kellner 2006:xxvii). The ecology of coca communications, adopted through a political economy approach, allows us to look at who has access to which processes via which media within the system, and to ask why.

### **Capital and Habitus in the Coca *Field***

As a way of analysing the strategies and potentials of people within the ecosystem of coca communications, I utilise Bourdieu's (1984; 1986; 1990) notions of 'field', forms of 'capital' and 'habitus'. Centred in a largely monoproducing locality, the ecosystem of coca communications can be characterised as a *field* by virtue of the fact that all those who are a part of it are linked in some way through, on the one hand, the production, exchange and consumption of the coca leaf (whether it be as producer, or as trader or shopkeeper who sells goods to the producer), and on the other, through these same processes surrounding the cultural products and discourses that



have the coca leaf as their gravitational centre.<sup>11</sup> Where Bourdieu defines a field as a 'network of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu 1993:30; cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:97), the coca *field* describes the network of relations of both coca production and the production of cultural products or discourse that interdepends on the coca production system, and the positions spoken of are held by individuals or groups positioned within the *field* according to the amount and type of *capital* each individual or group possesses, and the nature of their habitus. Hesmondhalgh (2006:216) writes, 'fields are, to a large extent... constituted precisely by struggles over these positions, which often take the form of a battle between established producers, institutions and styles, and heretical newcomers.' Rivera makes reference to Bourdieu's habitus in designating a network which integrates all Yungueños by virtue of their connectedness to coca:

This invisible network, which structures the loyalties, but also the acute interethnic Yungueño conflicts, seems to be... founded in the history and culture of coca, within which operate the cohesive forces of religiosity and the market, as well as the forces of factionalism and the unequal distribution of power.

(1994: Chapter 1, p.5)

Bourdieu (1984:101) has generated a theory of practice, whereby people's or groups' practice and behaviour are determined according to the formula,  $[(\textit{habitus}) (\textit{capital})] + \textit{field} = \textit{practice}$ . The habitus is an 'embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history' (1990:56), or a disposition constructed around an 'acquired system of generative schemes' (ibid.:55) that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions (1984:170) which in the case of a specific group or class, are 'mutually intelligible' and lead to the production of a 'common-sense world' (1990:58). The creation of such a world is made possible through the 'consensus on the meaning of practices and the world...' (ibid.).

...in other words, the harmonization of the agents' experiences and the constant reinforcement each of them receives from expression – individual or collective (in festivals for example), improvised or programmed (commonplaces, sayings) – of similar or identical experiences.

(Bourdieu 1990:58)

As will be further discussed in subsequent chapters, there is, from the vantage point of a person within the coca *field*, a three-tiered system founded upon the interchangeable properties of labour, class and ethnicity. The co-dependence of these three designations can be likened to Barnes' (1954:45) class as a 'category of thought', with its legacy in the Spanish conquest (See Chapter

---

<sup>11</sup> Other areas of the Yungas are more diverse in production. For example, some communities in the Irupana section focus on mangos and tomatoes, while communities at the higher altitudes towards Mt. Illimani grow potatoes and corn. I focus on the Chulumani section where coca continues to be the main income generator, and where other produce tends to be only for personal consumption. Those who are not coca producers become a part of the coca *field* when they enter the coca economy, exchanging goods and information within that system.



Two), yet the engendered social relations are quite real. As such, coca producers (or *campesinos* more generally) are by definition agriculturalists, lower class (*clase baja*) and indigenous.<sup>12</sup> The upper two tiers are non-agriculturalists and are usually mentioned together by agriculturalists. They are middle class (*clase media*) *mestizos* (persons considered to be of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent) and upper class (*clase alta*) *blancos* ('whites'). What this amounts to is a dichotomy between agriculturalist (the bottom tier) and non-agriculturalist (the top two tiers). Each of these two groups has a separate habitus whose structure is the result of historical conditions, although there are instances in which, as Yungueños, these coincide. In this, I would disagree with Rivera (1994:Chapter 1 p.5), who writes that all Yungueños share a homologous habitus. The difference in these groups' habitus translates into *social distance*, which Bourdieu (1977:82) refers to as the distance between objective positions within a *field*. Individuals are socially distanced by the historical and present social positionings that they carry with them at all times (*ibid.*), as well as by their stock of capital.

Bourdieu (1986) delineates four types of capital: 'economic capital', 'cultural capital,' 'social capital' and 'symbolic capital', each of which can be interchangeably converted into the other types. In his understanding, economic capital, which relates directly to monetary wealth or its institutionalisation in property rights and the like (*ibid.*:243), lies at the root of all other types of capital (*ibid.*:252).<sup>13</sup> Cultural capital has for Bourdieu (1986) to do with the accumulation of knowledge, legitimised in such ways as the endowment of qualifications, a definition that I will broaden to fit a context in which educational qualifications are only one aspect of a type of capital that includes knowledge and experience passed from generation to generation on agricultural practice or indigenous culture, knowledge gained through undertaking community leadership roles, as well as that accrued through attending agricultural extension courses, through auto-didactic reading, radio listening and so on.<sup>14</sup>

Social capital has to do with the social relationships with other individuals and groups and access to networks, which can be called upon and used to the advantage of those who possess this type

---

<sup>12</sup> Literally translated, *campesino* means one who lives in the country, or peasant. After the Agrarian Reform of 1953, the MNR party (*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*) made active attempts to replace the derogatory word *indio* with *campesino* (Heath 1973:81; Spedding 1994:155). The effect has been that the term is now synonymous with the word 'indigenous'. A note on translation: Where I consider there to be an English translation of a word with identical meaning to the word in need of translation, I have usually used that. Where a term encompasses ideas or meanings that cannot be captured in any one English word, I have retained the use of the Spanish or Aymara word. In the case at hand, I have retained the term *blanco*, which could be unproblematically translated as 'white', for questions of consistency, since the other two terms included in the three-tiered system (*campesino* and *mestizo*) are not so easily translated. I have placed non-English words in italics, but not those words that have been adopted into the English language. See Appendix A for a glossary of Spanish and Aymara terms.

<sup>13</sup> While the waving of an indigenous flag at a demonstration (perhaps a display of or part of the process of accumulation of symbolic or cultural capital), or a phone call to a beloved child (which might show the possession of and the desire to strengthen social capital) may be enacted with intentions that are quite aside from economic concerns, they nonetheless are able to be enacted because of a level of economic capital (the demonstrators require money to buy the food they consume during the demonstration and to fuel the buses that take them to their destination, the mother requires money to pay for the telephone call), and have the potential to lead to an accumulation of economic capital (better rights and living conditions for the demonstrators, the maintenance of a relationship for the mother that at some point may turn into labour capital or monetary remittances from a child studying in the city) (cf. Bourdieu 1990:122).

<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu does not restrict his definition to formal education, but talks about cultural capital in the *embodied* state, meaning 'in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body', in the *objectified* state, as exhibited in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, etc.), and in the *institutionalized* state, which includes educational qualifications (Bourdieu 1986:243). His definition also allows for cultural capital to be inherited within the family (*ibid.*:244; 1990:133).

of capital (Bourdieu 1986:248-249; cf. du Toit et al. 2007; Keane 1994). Bourdieu refers to social capital as the sum of the actual or potential resources linked to a durable network of relationships (Bourdieu 1986:248). It can be thought of as membership in a group, 'which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word' (ibid.:248-249). He writes:

The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected.

(Bourdieu 1986:249)

Given the indiscriminate gusto with which the concept of social capital has been taken up within development literature over the past decade or so, it is worth pausing to suggest that there is some merit in not straying too far from Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital, with its emphasis on power and social stratification. A transition has occurred via theorists such as Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993), that has shifted the concept from a focus on something an individual has by virtue of his or her social relationships and access to networks, to something that is shared by a group and can be assessed with relation to the pattern and quality of relationships between agents, social units and institutions (Bayat 2005:4).<sup>15</sup> While this conceptualisation has provided something that development organisations can adopt to advocate structural change, and has been actively embraced by the World Bank who describe social capital as 'not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together' (World Bank 2007a), it makes little sense to talk about whole societies having social capital (cf. Francis 2002; Green 2002:69; Woolcock 1998).<sup>16</sup> Capital is only valuable relative to its scarcity, so that the reason that my relationship with a wealthy landowner is beneficial and valuable to me (and can therefore be classified as social capital) is precisely because not everyone has that same relationship with the wealthy landowner. In a capitalist society, how might I use my social capital to exercise social mobility, if everyone else moves with me?

It follows that the relationships that both produce and are produced by social capital, are necessarily exclusionary. Groups within a society may have social cohesion of a sort, by virtue of the fact that their members have social capital (are all members of the group and connected to the other members). They may even potentially be said to possess group social capital in the sense

---

<sup>15</sup> Coleman (1988:98) shifted the concept so that it was no longer something possessed by an individual or group, but something that 'inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors.' Putnam (1993:167) broadened it further to include 'features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions'. Nederveen Pieterse (2006:126) has written that the approaches of Coleman and Putnam give primacy to informal social relations and group bonds at the expense of cultural difference. See Baron et al.'s (2000) volume on social capital, particularly their introductory chapter, which gives a historical overview of the evolution of the term, from Bourdieu, through Coleman and Putnam (Schuller et al. 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Green (2002:69) is critical of the way that the concept is used without paying heed to structural and power issues, and writes, 'The fact that social capital as an asset is visible only to outside experts who are keen to place an economic value on social institutions must render its potential and reality open to question.'

that they are well connected to an NGO or a rich benefactor. Yet not only does speaking in such a way run the risk of misrecognising the unequal distribution of social and other capital *within* that group and thereby essentialising the group as artificially whole, united and cohesive (cf. CIPCA 1976; Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:9 2001b:12), but it is also likely that the capital that can be attributed to the group as a whole can be owed to the fact that one or two of its members are well-connected (have social capital), well-educated (have cultural capital) or highly charismatic (facilitating the conversion of economic, social and cultural capital into symbolic capital) and thereby able to secure further capital on behalf of the group. Viewed in this way, it becomes impossible to talk about social capital in terms of 'social cohesion' as do the World Bank (2007a), and equally curious to talk about encouraging 'social capital generation by the state and civil society' (Bayat 2005).

In continuation, symbolic capital has, for Bourdieu, to do with status and recognition (or misrecognition) in that it refers to the representation or, we might say, the communication of any type of capital (Bourdieu 1986:255).<sup>17</sup> Stressing that all practices have an economic logic that may nonetheless be otherwise veiled, Bourdieu (1990:122) refers to symbolic capital as "'material capital" misrecognized and thus recognized.' He writes that it is the habitus, together with social and historical conditions, that transform the distribution of capital 'into a system of perceived differences, distinctive properties, that is, a distribution of symbolic capital, legitimate capital, whose objective truth is misrecognized' (1984:172). In other words, arbitrary relations are legitimised and thereby made durable and 'natural', through misrecognition, and it is in this way that relations of exploitation or domination are able to be maintained and reproduced without the use of force (Bourdieu 1990:112). The (mis)recognition of symbolic capital is in effect a practice via which dominated groups collaborate with their oppressors in contributing to and facilitating their continued domination (cf. Wacquant 1992:24). This is not so much a conscious collaboration as a function of the fit between the habitus and the conditions of the field in which it operates (ibid.). Following on from our discussion of social capital as it relates to groups, groups could be said to possess symbolic capital where they communicate the economic (and accompanying social and cultural) capital that they or their members have, to other groups, and in so doing work to either maintain or shift the power balances between these groups. This becomes closely related to an identity they work to construct for themselves and project beyond their immediate networks.

The value of each type of capital is determined within each field, while some capital has worth across all fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98). As an example, computing skills are a form of cultural capital that Yungas people see as potentially being of value to them outside the coca *field*, while knowing how to prepare a good coca plantation is not such a transferable skill. In order for assets to become and to remain valuable within the field, their worth must be made known to all members of the field, which can only be done through communication. Bourdieu describes this with reference to cultural capital:

---

<sup>17</sup> Bourdieu (1986:255) writes that symbolic capital is 'capital – in whatever form – insofar as it is represented, i.e., apprehended symbolically, in a relationship of knowledge or, more precisely, of misrecognition and recognition, presupposes the intervention of the habitus, as a socially constituted cognitive capacity'.

...it should not be forgotten that it exists as symbolically and materially active, effective capital only insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production... and beyond them, in the field of the social classes...

(1986:247)

Bourdieu's fields are structured according to the 'unequal distribution of capital' (ibid.:246), which 'amounts to the same thing' as power (ibid.:243). He likens the distribution of capital to 'the balance sheet of a power relation' (1984:172), as actors compete for scarce resources, which are more or less valuable, and thereby lead to greater or lesser symbolic capital, depending on their scarcity (1986:245-246). Mauss (1990:7) has a similar notion of a 'law and economy' based on exchange. In discussing his work, Douglas (1990:xii) writes that recording the entire credit structure of a community will allow us to know 'who gets left at the end of the day without honour or citizenship and who benefits from the cumulative transfers'.

The system of capital exchange that has resulted in the Yungas is one where land ownership (economic capital) is pivotal in the relations of coca production, as a person or family's land ownership situation determines the type of labour practices they are able to engage in (which has implications for social capital), their level of involvement within an organisation (social, cultural and symbolic capital), and their level of participation in exchange and trade practices (determined by the various types of capital possessed). All of this in turn has implications for the *power* that people are able to employ to engage in certain communicative activities, and the types of *cultural products* that they are able to produce and that are produced about them. The communicative acts in which people engage, (speaking on the radio, dancing in a festival, chewing coca), are possible according to their acquired dispositions or *habitus*, in combination with the accumulated *capital* they possess within a given *field*, and at the same time, communication *must* be undertaken in order for, on the one hand, common values to be maintained within the field, and on the other, for an individual or group's capital (with agreed-upon value) to be recognised or misrecognised and thereby legitimised within the field, in the form of symbolic capital.

### **Contestations of Discourse and Hegemony in the Communicative Ecosystem**

While Bourdieu has a broad understanding of cultural production which can be applied to scientific knowledge, law and religion (Hesmondhalgh 2006:212), he refers to the field of cultural production chiefly to mean the artistic and literary field, and cultural artefacts to be the works produced by the artists and writers (cf. Bourdieu 1993). I take a broader meaning of cultural production and exchange, to include the generation of meanings, values and *discourse*, which become the cultural

*products* or *artefacts*, and which in turn have implications for practice (cf. Durham and Kellner 2006). Discourses are, in Foucauldian terms, 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972:49), meaning the production of knowledge and the accompanying practice, as well as the power relations that inhere in such knowledge and practice (Weedon 1987:111). For Foucault, discursive flows cannot be separated from the flows of power, and it is as a function of the systems of knowledge that are the products of discourse and that have come about under certain social, historical and political conditions, that truths and falsehoods are constructed and legitimated (McHoul and Grace 1993:23, 29). Via discursive practices, objects and categories are created and made real, and people who are the objects of discourse begin to reproduce such categories by acting, thinking and feeling in particular ways according to what is being said about them or done to them (Foucault 1972:49; Escobar 1995:111).

What this has meant for indigenous Bolivians is an internalisation of a discourse constructed over the years around them and around the coca leaf that they produce and consume. This has taken place since the Spanish conquest when they were constructed as 'brutish and loathsome' by the conquistadors (Vespucci 1926:17-18), through to discourses of violent narcotraffickers that began during the cocaine boom of the 1980s (Clawson and Rensaellaer 1996:132; U.S. Department of State 2001). Today, the people are the objects of an only slightly more benign 'development discourse' (Escobar 1984; 1995; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Sachs 1992) that seeks to construct homogeneity, poverty and ignorance (Ribera 2003; Stichting Panfluit Bolivia 2007), even as local knowledges and culture are nominally respected. The reproduction of this discourse is made possible by the social (I will call it sociocultural) distance (Bourdieu 1977:82) between the three tiers of the coca *field* described above, where foreign donor organisations and La Paz-based intermediary NGOs are included in the top two tiers respectively and enter the *field* with a certain habitus and a certain level of capital transferable within the *field*. The distance between the tiers facilitates a myopia to local differentiation, creating a homogeneity of poverty and ignorance that is partly internalised by local people and partly strategically enacted by them in order to play the game of capital accumulation. This enables a reinforcement on the part of the development organisations, whose visions of the locality are thus confirmed (Crisell 1986:197; Schramm and Roberts 1971).<sup>18</sup>

However, if as Elias (eg. Elias and Scotson 1994) argues, the ability of established groups to develop and sustain a 'we-image' based on a sense of superiority, is dependent on the internalisation of an imposed sense of unworthiness and inferiority by the dominated group, it follows that where this is not the case, a resistance is produced to the subject position offered by the dominant discourse (Featherstone 1995:124). If power is, as Foucault defines it, a 'multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate' (1978:92), and a 'dynamic of control and lack of control between discourses and their subjects' (Weedon 1987:113), a discourse

---

<sup>18</sup> Schramm and Roberts' (1971) volume includes numerous studies that pay attention to reinforcement tendencies in audiences. Eg: Krech and Crutchfield (1971).

may be defined as a 'site of discursive conflict over how subjectivities and social relations should be constituted and social control exercised' (Weedon 1987:110). In other words, within a discourse there exists the possibility to challenge dominant practices and ways of thinking. The system of interdependencies can shift so that the dominated group gains in social power and confidence and the contrasts and tensions in the society increase (Featherstone, 1995:124-5).

How then does this capacity to internalise ideas projected onto one's self, and thereby to change, together with a capacity to make strategic and conscious decisions about how to act, reconcile with the apparently unchangeable and historically determined nature of the habitus? In fact, it is this interplay between strategy and determinism that is a central tenet of Bourdieu's ideas of habitus, for while the habitus is structured through historical conditioning (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:127) and generates practice accordingly, there are available "objective potentialities" immediately given in the immediate present' (ibid.:129). Individuals and groups have certain parameters within which to move, according to the rules of the *field*, according to their habitus, and most importantly, according to the differential amounts of capital that they possess. It is the latter that most differentiates within the field and has the potential to allow for social mobility, and to afford the capacity to influence discourse and knowledge systems, or to create what Foucault terms a 'counter-discourse' (Foucault 1977:209).

Also relevant here are Gramsci's (1971) writings on hegemony, which names the problem of the mode of production and reproduction of the power relations upon which various forms of inequality are based (Crehan 2002:104). In the same way that for Foucault the objects of a discourse internalise that discourse, allowing it to become the dominant one, and for Bourdieu (1990:112) dominant groups legitimate subordination through misrecognition, groups that Gramsci calls 'subaltern' must necessarily 'consent' to subordination, in order for domination to be long-term (Gramsci 1971:12; cf. Crehan 2002:101). The consent afforded to the dominant groups, he writes, depends upon the prestige that the dominant group enjoys due to its 'position and function in the world of production' (ibid.:12). However, when dominant groups or political parties cease to represent the class or group that they originated as an expression of, a 'crisis of authority' comes about (ibid.:210), such as can be said to have occurred in 2003 when protestors expressed their discontent at the deviation that had occurred between the MNR party<sup>19</sup> when it came into power in a pro-indigenous revolution in 1952, and what it had since become. When 'subalterns' do find the expression of a new autonomy, and a new 'intellectual and moral order' (Gramsci 1971:388), a counter-hegemony has come about, made possible by the position that these groups occupy within the relations of material and, correspondingly, cultural production. At the same time, these groups

---

<sup>19</sup> *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*, Nationalist Revolutionary Movement. See Appendix B for a list of acronyms and their significations. The MNR was left of centre when it came to power in a bloody revolution in April 1952, and was responsible for implementing far-reaching constitutional reform aimed to benefit the *campesino* majority (Heath 1973:78). Since that time, however, the MNR has moved steadily away from its original pro-indigenous ideals, and under President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, effected widespread neoliberal reforms in line with IMF, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and United States recommendations, that were the focus of nation-wide protests by citizens disenchanted with the worsening of their living conditions (cf. Kohl and Farthing 2006:65). See Klein (1969) on the evolution of the MNR.



have had to develop 'more universal concepts and more refined and decisive ideological weapons' (ibid.).

Coca is at a pivotal point in the processes occurring in Bolivia today of a growing sense of pride in being indigenous, and a growing sense of confidence in what indigenous peoples are able to achieve in terms of their own autonomy. Cano (2001:5) writes that coca has become 'the only crop that has given them power towards (the State) and the international community, as without having sown it, as they say themselves, they would not have been able to attract their attention'. As such, it is leverage over the mode of material production that corresponds to the possibility to construct a counter-hegemony and to contribute to the creation of discourse and identity, and to the right to conceptualise and affirm one's own sense of self and place in the world. The creation of these discourses occurs through communication, as the daily content and practice of the communicative ecosystem (Altheide 1994:667; Hearn and Foth 2007:1). A political economic communicative ecology aims to capture all of this and to situate people within this complex communicative system, alongside the development practitioners who enter the *field* claiming benign disassociation.

## **Yungueños in History and the World: Historical Relations of Material and Cultural Production**

In order to understand the story at hand, it is necessary first to zoom out, both spatially and temporally, to assess the situation through a wider, more distant lens. As we zoom out from the plaza (there is Warita waving, getting smaller), the whole of the Yungas comes into view – ripples of green, with tiny towns sprinkled intermittently, a constant stream of traffic connecting them. Zoom out further, and we see this traffic exiting the Yungas in several directions, climbing both up and out of the valleys onto the massive grey expanse of the *altiplano*, and down further into the steamy Amazon basin. Out further still, and the South American continent comes into view, North America, the Atlantic Ocean, Europe and Africa. There is a sailing vessel crossing the Atlantic, heading for South America. It is 1524. We know who that is.

Of course, the story of the Yungas does not begin here. Nor does it begin with the relocation of the Aymara people from the *altiplano* to the tropical lowlands under orders of the Inca rulers, nor with the driving out and the extermination of the Leco people who are said to have inhabited the Yungas before the relocation (Heath 1973:76). But it is this moment, at which Europe and America meet, that marks the beginning of the story of exploitation and domination that exists in the contemporary Yungas understanding of power relationships between Yungas people and the rest of the world (cf. Harris 1995:110; Spedding 1996:26). In the contemporary understanding, it is at this point in history that local-outsider relationships begin to be characterised by two interconnected sets of contested power relations, the first of which pertains to the control of the production, distribution, exchange

and consumption of material (natural and cultivable) resources (primarily coca) and the second of which pertains to the control of the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of cultural resources.

It is not long after the arrival of the Spanish on South American soil, that the newcomers had taken control of the coca fields being worked at that time by Aymara people under the dominion of the Incas (Sanabria 1993:39). Throughout documented history then, and before, the inhabitants of the Yungas have been entwined in power relationships pertaining to the production of coca (cf. Allen 1988:220; Antonil 1978; Martindale 1886; Sanabria 1993). These relationships of material production have always been accompanied by those of cultural production, as the Spanish set about creating a discourse surrounding the indigenous people of Bolivia, that was closely tied to their relationship to and consumption of the coca leaf (Martindale 1886; Vespucci 1926; cf. Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, eg: Cáceres 1986).

Skip forward in time a few centuries to the 1980s. It has been discovered within that time that a certain alkaloid of the leaf can be isolated to create a drug that is used first as an anaesthetic, enthusiastically endorsed by psychologist Sigmund Freud (Bascopé Aspiazú 1982:37; Gootenberg 2001:3; Mortimer 1901:413, 428), and later as a recreational drug. If we maintain our distant vantage point, we can see now how the passage of people and goods has been extended beyond traditional trade routes to connect North and South America. And how the Northerners are looking Southward, calculating how to solve what to them amounts to a national security problem (Collett 1989; Riley 1996).

It was in the 1980s that the Yungas, along with other coca growing zones, was placed on the international 'development' agenda, and Yungas residents became the recipients of a special brand of 'Alternative Development' whose explicit aim was the substitution of coca for other crops (cf. Léons 1997, Spedding 1989; 2003; 2004). Accompanying what became another reincarnation of the struggle between local people and outsiders over control of the mode of coca production was a struggle over the production of cultural resources. At this time, the term 'development discourses' was being coined to describe the way in which knowledges pertaining to development practices and the people who are to be 'developed' are created and become truths. Writers such as Colombian Arturo Escobar (1984:194) wrote that development practices and the ideas surrounding this concept caused people from 'underdeveloped' countries to devalue themselves and their cultures. On top of the regular development discourses referred to by Escobar, the coca growers and their leaf were now being cast as villains (Clawson and Rensaellaer 1996:132; U.S. Department of State 2001), and they have fought this depiction of themselves, just as they have fought the loss of control over the uninhibited production and distribution of the leaf.

It will be the purpose of the second chapter of this thesis to outline the wider political economy of which the Yungas people are a part and to provide a brief historical background to the coca leaf



and the power struggles of which this natural commodity has been both a material and an ideological protagonist. I will outline the way in which coca has become the centre of alternative development projects and the discourses that have surrounded these processes. It will become clear why contemporary local-outsider relationships are characterised in the Yungueño understanding by a long history of inequalities based upon the interlocking and interdependent struggles over material resources and cultural resources, and why development organisations and development workers represent these continuing struggles.

### **Relations of Coca Production, Exchange and Consumption: The Basis for a Communicative Ecosystem**

Now that we have an understanding of where the Yungueños are situated within the global political economy, and the role of the coca leaf in connecting them to this world system, let us zoom back down and forward through time and space (the Atlantic Ocean, South America, the Yungas, the plaza, Warita waving...) to look more closely at the coca production system as it is structured in the Yungas today. The purpose of the third chapter will be to outline the functioning of this system as a *field* and the relations embedded in it, and to demonstrate how this system lays the basis for the 'communicative ecosystem' in the Yungas, as it is through the mechanisms of production, consumption, distribution and exchange of the coca leaf, held together by relations of land ownership, labour, and participation in unions and other organisations, that the communicative ecosystem is constructed and articulated.

As any Yungueño will attest, all inhabitants of the Yungas depend on the coca leaf in some way, whether it be through direct productive practices, or indirectly via the sale of goods or services to coca producers. The most perceptible distinction within this system is between these two groups; the agriculturalists (the *campesinos*), who generally reside in the *campo* (country) or communities, and the non-agriculturalists, who almost exclusively reside in the town (*el pueblo*) and include the two upper tiers of the three-tiered system discussed on pages 16-17; the *mestizos* and *blancos*. While in practice it is much more complex, this division is usually simplified according to the 'thought categories' (Barnes 1954:45) of class and ethnicity that are pegged to those labour categories. Those who live in the town are *mestizo* (of mixed descent) or *blanco* (white) and regarded as being of a higher class, while those who live in the *campo* are indigenous and regarded as being of a lower class. The three groups have distinct habitus, which intersect in certain instances (Bourdieu 1984; 1990).

This distinction has its legacy in the Spanish conquest, as the Spanish landlords dispossessed of their *haciendas* after the Agrarian Reform of 1953 tended to concentrate in the towns and become intermediaries for the sale of coca, or take on roles in the government, services or hospitality (Rivera 1994:Chapter 3, p2; Spedding 1994:144). Naturally, this distinction, which has implications

in terms of geographical location, economic capital, prestige and so on, also has implications for the types of communicational activities in which each of these groups can participate, and the media tools which they are able to access. This will become clear through the contrasting examples of the radio and telecentre, in chapters four, five and six.

However, differentiation naturally occurs also within these two groups. To demonstrate this in the case of coca-growing communities, I begin with a discussion of land, which is an asset of crucial importance if one is to work toward building upon one's capital assets and achieving a better positioning within the coca *field*. A family must own land of its own in order to be able to participate in *ayni*, the reciprocal labour practice that still dominates in the Yungas and is highly important in terms of social and communicational exchange (cf. CIPCA 1976:51-52; Spedding 1994:74 –77; 2004:144-146; Spedding and Llanos 1999:151-184). Much of the daily exchange of information, whether it be about a remedy for an illness, a domestic quarrel or an ensuing road blockade, occurs in the coca field (Rivera 1994: Chapter 1 p3; Spedding 1994). Warita's family, newly-arrived in the Yungas, have no land of their own and are excluded to a certain extent from the particular brand of social intercourse that occurs between well-established reciprocal work groups.

Aside from the issue of land ownership, the availability of labour and the possibility of participating in labour activities where communication takes place also depends upon having on the one hand, able-bodied workers within one's own family, and on the other, access to workers from other families to trade labour with through *ayni*. This means having reliable social relationships and being a part of strong social networks (Barnes 1954; Keane 1994; Slater and Tacchi 2004). These social relationships fall into the category of social capital. Warita's family will have to build upon an initially low stock of social capital (Bourdieu 1986; du Toit et al. 2007), as with only two adults in the family and no extended family or friends in the area, they have no excess labour to trade.

A family must also own land to be eligible to be a part of the local coca *sindicato* (union), and therefore to be involved in the communicational processes that take place at *sindicato* meetings (Spedding 1994:151-152; Spedding and Llanos 1999:53).<sup>20</sup> To have the opportunity to exercise influence in local decision-making processes, a family must also have the social and symbolic capital necessary to be taken seriously and respected by other members of the community (Bourdieu 1990:119). This respect, or symbolic capital, may be earned through the possession of large extensions of land, social capital and cultural capital, as may be the case where someone has studied, or gained experience through holding *sindicato* roles.

---

<sup>20</sup> Each community has a *sindicato* or union, which is responsible for the organisation of communal infrastructure and lands and is active in the defence of the coca leaf. The *sindicato* is subsumed within a multi-tiered structure and is subordinated to the sub-central (canton), which lies beneath the central (sub-region), followed by the provincial-level federation, which in turn is subordinated to the national *campesino* union CSUTCB (*Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* or United Syndicate Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (Conzelman 2007:9; Healy 1985:4). The *sindicato* system was implemented by the MNR party (*Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario*) after the Agrarian Reform of 1953. See also CIPCA (1976), Colque and Spedding (n.d.) and Spedding (2004).

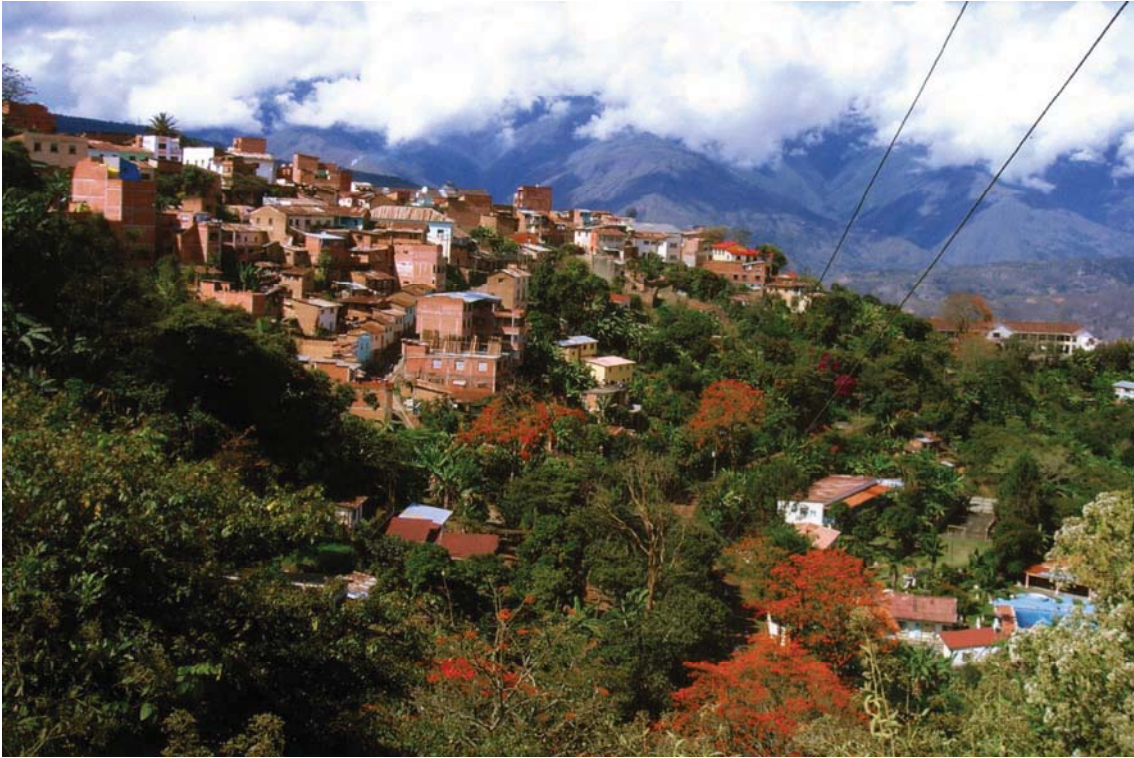
Land ownership on a scale sufficient to afford a reasonably good yield of coca, along with the sufficient labour to spare a body for travel, are also necessary to make it worthwhile for a family to travel to sell its coca in the markets of the towns or cities. This travel facilitates new communicational activities, as the traveller shifts to a different geographical part of the communicative ecosystem, and builds new social relationships or accumulates social capital, which may be called upon at an opportune time (Bourdieu 1986:248-249; Baron et al. 2000; du Toit et al. 2007). Warita's family, of course, do not have the necessary capital to make such journeys worthwhile and, when they eventually do secure land, sell their minimal yield to intermediaries who visit their community, restricting the types of communicational activities in which they are able to participate.

Finally, the consumption of coca is in itself a communicative practice. This section of Chapter Two will treat the cultural practices that surround the consumption of coca and will argue that coca consumption is not only about facilitating communication with other chewers, but is also the communication of a statement about the chewer's indigenous identity, as only indigenous people and the odd anthropologist chew coca. As such, groups of indigenous people protesting against the government chew coca, not only because it is a part of their daily practice, but also because in doing so, they are working to create and strengthen a discourse about themselves that involves indigeneity and resistance. As a group, they would not have the capacity to make such statements, without having the collective economic surplus, not to mention the coca surplus to be able to engage in the symbolic act of chewing coca, as well as the necessary social capital to organise themselves.<sup>21</sup> In other words, what is important here is that coca-growers at this time have a certain, albeit restricted, level of control over the mode of coca production and therefore also a certain ability to participate in and, at some level, control cultural production through their communicative act of consumption.

As this discussion has aimed to demonstrate, a person or family's situation within the coca *field*, determined by their status as coca producers or non-producers, their possession of land, their social networks and labour capital, their participation in local *sindicatos*, and their participation in travel for exchange, (all of these corresponding to the various types of capital described above), determines their ability to participate in, to access and to make use of various communicative mechanisms, and at the same time determines their situation within the relations of cultural production and their ability to create a discourse favourable to themselves. This last is true both for individuals or individual family units, and for coca growers as a collective group. The coca production system then, lays the basis for the communicative ecosystem, and a person's or group's ability to manoeuvre within the one, will affect the way in which they are able to do so in the other.

---

<sup>21</sup> Comparisons can be drawn between coca consumption and that of qat around the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Like the coca leaf, qat is an important social connector, and is stigmatised as a narcotic by non-consuming society. See Weir (1985) and Varisco (1986; 1988) on qat in Yemen. For similarities with the consumption of betel nut in the Pacific Region and South East Asia, see Hirsch (1990) for Papua New Guinea, and Katz and White (1997) generally. See also Laufer's (1919) 'Coca and Betel Chewing: A Query.'



**FIGURE 5: View of Chulumani.**

(Reproduced with permission from Anita Butler, October 2004).





FIGURE 6: Patronal *fiesta*, Yungas town. (Photo by author, June 2004).

## ICTs as Social Connectors in the Ecosystem of Coca Communications: Inclusions and Exclusions

When communication technologies such as radio and the Internet enter into the communicative system described above, they form linkages in various ways to the already existing modes of communication. Chapter Four will describe the ways in which the various communications media, old and new, connect, feed off one another and support each other in creating a functioning communicative ecosystem that can be tapped into by people or groups of people wishing to achieve certain goals. The media that form a part of this system include face-to-face communication (facilitated by travel, meetings, and courses or seminars run by various actors, including NGOs), telephone, television, print media such as newspapers, magazines and leaflets, radio and the Internet. Each of these media has a role to play within the ecosystem, which differs according to the nature of the technology; whether the communicator needs to shift his or her geographical location in order to use it (cf. Beltrán 2006a:81; Crisell 1986:215; Spitulink 2002:339), whether it is an oral, aural or visual medium and whether it involves written text (cf. Kellner 2002; Ricoeur 1991), whether there is an economic cost for use, whether the flow of information is uni- or bi-directional (cf. Brecht 2006; Contreras Baspineiro 2000b), whether it involves broadcasting or narrowcasting, terms that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four (cf. Becker 2006; Hirst and Harrison 2007; Naficy 1998), and whether the communication is immediate or time-delayed. Because of the nature of each medium, and the way in which communications projects are implemented, each medium is more or less relevant and accessible to a person depending upon his or her position within the coca *field*.

Hearn and Foth (2007a:1) outline their vision of a communicative ecology as having three layers: a technological layer consisting of the devices and media that enable communication and interaction, a social layer that consists of people and modes of social organisation, whether formal or informal, and a discursive layer which refers to the content of communication – ‘the ideas or themes that constitute the known social universe that the ecology operates in’ (Hearn and Foth 2007a:1; cf. Allison 2007; Foth and Hearn 2007b).<sup>22</sup> In such a case, my Chapter Three would correspond to Hearn and Foth’s social layer, while Chapter Four would, and does, introduce the technological element. However, I prefer not to think of these as separate layers, rather that the technological devices act as parallel extensions to the face-to-face communication that occurs when distance is no obstacle. All communication is social, whether mediated by a technology or not.

In this way, families and work groups in the Yungas communicate with each other face-to-face as they work in the fields, and when they are separated, they look to media such as the telephone and radio to be able to maintain those communicative relationships (cf. Nair et al. 2006:6; Skuse and

---

<sup>22</sup> Allison (2007) has applied this three layer model of communicative ecology to her analysis of ‘primary attention groups’ and what she calls ‘individual community’ in the information age.

Cousins 2007). Likewise, members of the coca *sindicatos* communicate with each other during monthly meetings, and when it is necessary to widen this audience, they look to radio to strengthen the existing social organisation and to contribute to the discourse that is the product of these communicative practices – Hearn and Foth’s third layer. These cultural products or discourse cannot be considered a layer either, and certainly not a third-ranking one, because they inhere in all communicative practices, face-to-face or technologically mediated, and are the stuff that makes the communicative ecosystem communicative.

The purpose of the fourth chapter then, is to introduce the technological elements of the communicative ecosystem that are the parallel extensions of people’s daily social activities, attempting a broad overview of the communicative ecosystem in its entirety, and to demonstrate how a political economy approach may shed light on the types of communicative interactions that are able to take place within a communicative ecosystem. A person’s or group’s position within the coca *field* (their capital and habitus) affects their ability and authority to participate in communicative practices at the face-to-face level, as well as their ability and authority to use the newer technological media as tools with which to achieve their goals of capital accumulation. The nature of these different media, as mentioned above, makes some media more relevant and purposeful for certain people in certain positions, than for others.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, when the aim of a development project is to intentionally insert a new communications technology into the already existing communicative ecosystem, it is likely to become a more relevant part of people’s lives when the entire system is first understood by the development organisations, and a specific target group with specific communication needs is identified. This requires attention to be paid to the composition of the coca production system and the power relations that inhere in it. While Chapter Four paints a broad picture of the entire ecosystem of coca communications, Chapters Five and Six will each adopt a case study through which to apply these ideas more thoroughly. The first relates to the study of Chulumani’s local radio station, Radio Yungas, and the second to an Internet telecentre project based in Chulumani.

## **Radio Yungas: Social Networker and Platform for Cultural Production and Contestation**

Based in Chulumani, Radio Yungas began broadcasting in its current form in 1978 on the initiative of the Dutch Augustinian padres who occupied Chulumani’s parish at that time (Anonymous n.d.:1; Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas 1984:6). It is now administrated by the La Paz-based NGO

---

<sup>23</sup> This is where the utility in Altheide’s (1994:667) including ‘format’ as one of his three dimensions to a communicative ecology can be acknowledged, although he too separates ‘information technology’ from ‘social activity’ as the other two dimensions. Nair et al. (2006:3-5) also make a distinction between the social and technological in their ‘Local Information Networks’, but write that these are nonetheless not separate systems, as technology-mediated links can facilitate social connections between members of the same or different communities, at either short or long ranges (Nair et al. 2006:5).

*Claridad*, with the Catholic parish padres and *hermanas* (sisters or nuns) as caretakers. The station now services a large section of the Yungas and some sections of neighbouring provinces and is almost entirely self-funded.

The medium of radio has certain characteristics which make it a particularly important and strategic one for various social actors within the Yungas. These include its portability and its nature as non-visual, meaning it can become a part of the 'soundscape' of the everyday in a way that other media cannot (cf. Scannell 1991; Spitulnik 2002; Tacchi 1998; Tacchi 2000). I use the term soundscape here, as does Alain Corbin (1998:ix), who writes of soundscape, 'If one can agree that landscape is a way of analyzing space, of loading it with meanings and emotions, and of making it available for aesthetic appreciation, the landscape defined by various kinds of sound fits this definition particularly well.' Feld (1990) writes of soundscape as a 'spatio-acoustic mosaic', which consists of interacting and overlapping sounds. He writes, 'all sounds are dense, multilayered, overlapping, alternating and interlocking' (ibid.:265; cf. Tacchi 1998:37), so that many different sounds contribute to the everyday soundscape of the coca field, radio sound being just one, albeit an important one. Further, the radio is widely accessible as it does not require literacy for use, its technology allows for listener participation and bi-directional communication (Contreras Baspineiro 2000), and it is more cost-efficient than other media, allowing it to become almost entirely community funded (cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:15-16).

In the case of both the radio and the Internet, people's initial use of the media is for the purpose of maintaining and where necessary, extending the already existing social networks upon which a favourable position within the relations of production depend (Keane 1994; Skuse and Cousins 2007; Slater and Tacchi 2004). This is in line with Slater and Tacchi's idea that ICT projects should 'enlist and expand existing networks' (2004:73). They write:

Communities comprise complex social networks, with equally complex and consequential inclusions and exclusions. They already contain flows of information and communication, as well as blockages to those flows. ICT initiatives can understand their interventions in the community in terms of how they connect to these social networks, and how they reconfigure them or create new ones.

(Slater and Tacchi 2004:73)

Radio Yungas is instrumental in facilitating the work of maintaining and extending existing social networks because of its participatory programmes and message slots, which create opportunities for what I will call 'false *narrowcasting*', the targeting of information at specific individuals or groups of people via mass media, in effect, through *broadcasting* (See Chapter Four; Naficy 1998; Sterne 2005). This may mean that a child will send a message via the radio letting her mother know when she will be arriving home from school, or a husband may use the radio to ask his wife to begin



harvesting the coca as he has been waylaid. The following is one such example, taken from one of Radio Yungas' participatory programmes:

...I want to send a message to the community of A where my wife is... to tell her to bring a pack animal to Huayrapata, plus two pounds of potatoes because I'm here in Irupana. I'll leave early tomorrow for Churubamba with the Civil Notary and can the companions who are there, please wait.

(*El Viajero*, Radio Yungas, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2004)

This man works to maintain already existing social networks (to protect investments of social capital) and at the same time to protect his economic capital by facilitating his business arrangements (du Toit et al. 2007; Horst and Miller 2006; Skuse and Cousins 2007). However, while everyone is in theory welcomed to use the radio to communicate, a person's position within the coca *field*, or the types of capital that they possess within this *field*, will influence whether or not they have the social authority to do this. Warita's mother Carola, as a newly arrived immigrant with no land of her own, does not feel that she has the authority to speak over the radio and to dominate the soundscape of the Yungas coca fields, even for a few seconds. It is those who are most established within the coca production system, meaning those who own land of their own, have strong social networks and especially those whose cultural and symbolic capital has been recognised enough for them to be elected into important *sindicato* roles, who feel entitled to use the radio as a medium through which to build further upon the capital they already possess. These people are most likely to contribute to the cultural discourses that are created and reinforced via the radio. I will discuss radio use from the perspectives of various different actors, including those who I call listener-narrowcaster-broadcasters, the elected community *corresponsales* (correspondents), the paid staff members, and the administrators (the Catholic Church and NGO *Claridad*).

The radio becomes a tool for the accumulation of capital of those who are already in a favourable position within the coca *field*, both on an individual and at the group level (Bourdieu 1986). The latter becomes especially important when we cast our minds back to the discussion of discourse and hegemony pursued above. Dominant individuals are able to use the radio to earn collective capital for the coca growers as a unified group, as they contribute to the creation of discourse by way of strengthening broad social networks and legitimising identities. Such unity, where it is achieved, might exist only in the sense of 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983; cf. Allison 2007; Appadurai 1996:5), but it is real in the sense that these discourses reinforce a separation between local people (indigenous coca growers) and outsiders (both national and international, *mestizo* and *blanco*) who are opposed to the coca leaf (cf. Featherstone 1995:112).<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Allison (2007:4) writes of the ways in which people imagine themselves to be a part of a 'nation-state communicative ecology.'

Here, we might speak of the construction of a counter-discourse (Foucault 1972; cf. Dirks et al. 1994; Harris 1995; Stephenson 2000), or counter-hegemony (Gramsci 1971; cf. Scott 1985), or we might concede that in this instance, in this geographical and social space or in the field of coca production, this is in fact the dominant discourse. Coca growers in the Yungas are able to maintain and reinforce the dominant discourse and to reproduce the social order – in other words, control the mode of cultural production, precisely because they control the mode of coca production (cf. Gramsci 1971:12). Importantly, with the exception of the Director's salary, it is solely with the economic surplus that the coca growers gain through their sale of coca, that the radio is funded. This surplus is filtered into the radio through the sale of airspace in the way of messages, advertisements and song requests.

### **The Internet Telecentre: Tales of an Introduced Species**

Telecentres have blossomed in recent years as development tools aimed to narrow the 'digital divide', in line with the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015, one of which is to 'make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies' (United Nations Millenium Project 2005:xiii). The telecentre administrated by La Paz-based NGO *Alma*, and funded by Dutch NGO *Vida*, boasted four computers with satellite-received Internet access for public use, and one for the administrator. The project proposal written by one of *Alma's* staff members to secure funding described how the telecentre would bring positive improvements in education, community organisation, productivity, employment, urban planning, credit management, as well as access to information and communication (Ribera 2003:34-36). Social grassroots organisations would be strengthened through the promotion of new leaders, helping to solve problems within the community. Community participation would be made more 'dynamic' and communication with local governments would be made easier, strengthening administrative decentralisation. In particular, tools would be made available that 'strengthen and defend the voices of indigenous groups, women's groups, *campesinos*, youths and other marginalised and exploited sectors' (ibid.:35).

However, for the time that it was in operation between September 2003 and April 2004, the telecentre was used predominantly by town-dwelling school students who came from families endowed with enough economic capital to be able to afford to pay for them to use the telecentre (and not contribute to the family's pool of labour) during their free time in the school holidays, or in the case of those students who hailed from the communities and were attending school in town, to send them from their communities to live in Chulumani (and not contribute their labour) during term-time (cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:22; 2004a:6; IICD 2005:58-59; Powell 2007; Rice 2002).<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> The telecentre closed in April 2004 amid multi-directional accusations of wrong-doing and was re-opened shortly before my fieldwork period ended in 2005, this time in the parish library. It was to be run by the padres, with assistance from the Catholic University in La Paz.

As was the case with the radio, access to the telecentre and relevance of the telecentre to people's lives depended on individuals' or groups' positions within the coca *field*.

Due to both the nature of the medium, and the way in which it was implemented, which will be discussed further in Chapter Six, people who were able to use the telecentre fit six criteria that corresponded to their position within the coca *field*. To begin with, in order to access the telecentre they needed to be geographically located in the town, and were thereby not engaged in agricultural activities (IICD 2005:59). Second, they needed to have the time surplus available to be spent on accessing the telecentre (*ibid.*). Third, they or their family needed to be in a certain position with regards to land ownership, labour capital and so on, in order to have the economic surplus to spend on using the Internet, as well as to reside in the town whilst not contributing labour to the family's business. Fourth, they needed to have come from a family that was in a position to convert economic capital into cultural capital, in other words to send a child to school to acquire literacy skills and the confidence to learn the new skills demanded by the computer and Internet (*cf.* Bourdieu 1986:244; Kellner 2002). They also needed to be in a position to regularly practise those skills, which is not often the case for coca growers. Fifth, they needed to envisage a relevance of the Internet to their lives, which tended to be the case for people who had friends or relatives with whom they wished to communicate outside of the Yungas, often where families had the sufficient capital of various types to send their children to school in La Paz (*cf.* CRIS BOLIVIA 2003:39; IICD 2005:58-59; Nair et al. 2006:53; Slater and Tacchi 2004:75). And finally, they needed to be able to develop a sense of ownership over the telecentre and the new medium, which occurred only for town-based individuals, as it was they who were invited to attend consultations, who were able to attend courses, and who were employed as staff members (Gumucio-Dagron 2003; 2004a; IICD 2005:59).

Those school students who did use the telecentre used it predominantly to gain social capital by way of maintaining or strengthening already existing social networks (du Toit et al. 2007; Miller and Slater 2000:81; Skuse and Cousins 2007), either by communicating with friends in La Paz via email and chat, or by using the telecentre as a social space in which to communicate with friends face-to-face (*cf.* Baym 2002; Benjamin 2001:77; Miller and Slater 2000:72-75; Slater 2002; Slater and Tacchi 2004:65). When students accessed information from beyond their existing social networks, they did it in a way that placed them in a subordinate relationship to those external sources, as they did not have the skills or the will to analyse and mediate in a meaningful way the information that they downloaded, nor did they have the skills to respond by creating their own content on the Internet, and thereby to contribute to the cultural production that occurs via this medium (*cf.* Castells 1996; 2004; Sassen 1999).

In relation to the hopes placed upon telecentres in a global development context, this telecentre may be said to have narrowed the 'digital divide' for those students who were able to use the telecentre. But the social, economic and political divides that necessitated the exclusion of the rest

of the population remained or perhaps were, in some small way, deepened (Gigler 2001:37; Gómez and Martínez 2001:1; Rice 2002:106; Skuse and Cousins 2007:188). Because of the nature of this medium, but also because of the way in which the project was implemented, which will be discussed in greater detail in the final chapter, access was divided along lines of labour, class and ethnicity.

Due to the fact that these unequal power relationships are now perceived to be embodied by foreigners and elites such as those who work for NGOs, the telecentre and accompanying projects became for local people an expression of the continuation of these unequal power relationships. The project may have held greater relevance for more local people and for a more diverse cross-section of people if the communicative ecosystem of the area - the ecosystem of coca communications, which is inherently tied to the coca production system - had been taken into account, and the project more creatively implemented in such a way that it would become an effective part of this system, rather than an introduced, rogue species. One way in which this may have been achieved is through convergence with the radio, a medium that is already an integral part of this system (cf. CRIS Bolivia 2003; Girard 2000; 2001; n.d.; Gómez and Martínez 2001; Sitoni and Gorgen 2005; Tacchi et al. 2003a; Tacchi et al. 2003b; Wilson et al. 2005).

### **Developing the Ecosystem of Coca Communications: Development 'Organisms' and Environmental Adaptation**

This final chapter returns the spotlight to the organisations that work to make available such communication technologies to communities and to the way in which these organisations themselves (in line with the ecosystem metaphor, 'organisms') become players within the communicative ecosystem. As ambassadors of the 'outsiders' in this (hi)story, development organisations and staff have the opportunity to either work to alter the historical and continuing balance of power existing between local people and outsiders, or to reproduce it, depending on the way in which they become a part of the communicative ecosystem, and the extent to which they are mindful of the material (coca) and cultural (coca related) production systems that underlie the communicative ecosystem, as well as the wider social, political, economic and communicational systems within which these systems are embedded. Projects that are implemented with the existing communicative ecosystem in mind are also likely to be more useful and relevant to people's lives.

In the case studies of the Internet telecentre and community projects, dysfunctional communication between the implementing NGOs and local people was the result of both a physical and a sociocultural distance (Bourdieu 1977:82) between the three tiers described above, which led to differing understandings of the local reality. Local people considered poverty to be related to a person's positioning within the coca *field*, as measured by land ownership, labour capital, social

networks, participation in local decision-making organisations, and the ability to participate in exchange networks to maximise their economic capital. For the NGOs, poverty was something experienced by the region as a whole, as manifested through poor infrastructure, literacy levels and the availability of opportunities beyond coca growing. It was assumed that everyone in the region would have as a common aim to 'escape' such poverty (Stichting Panfluit Bolivia 2007; Ribera 2003).

Likewise, people's experiences of the negotiation between community and individuality (cf. Barnes 1954), and their expectations in terms of a 'modern' future with individual economic and cultural capital accumulation, were quite different from that envisaged by the NGOs (cf. Arce and Long 2000; CIPCA 1976). The latter saw homogenous communities, with members working together for the communal good, whilst protecting their indigenous culture and knowledge (cf. Blaikie 2000:1046; Gumucio-Dagron 2001b:11-12; Spedding and Llanos 1999:2-3). These divergent discourses and a disregard for the coca production system had implications for the way in which the project was implemented, with meetings being called at inappropriate times of the day, responsibility being delegated in ways that were at odds with the local leadership system, and labour being enlisted in ways that disrupted existing labour patterns (cf. IICD 2005:58-9). This, even as the organisations strove to seek the 'participation' of the people and respect their local knowledges (cf. Chambers 1983; Cernea 1985; 1989; Hobart 1993; van der Ploeg 1993). In addition, the incapacity to communicate within the already existing linkages of the communicative ecosystem led to the NGOs reaffirming their position as outsiders, creating their own communicative system in disjunction with the existing one.

However, it would be unsporting to suggest that the NGOs' incapacity to conceptualise these communities as consisting of heterogenous and differentiated clusters of individuals with differing capital assets was due to a simple failing on their part. Rather, I suggest that the conceptualisation of communities as homogenous in both poverty and ignorance is a function of the dominant 'development discourse' as it currently stands (Escobar 1984; 1995; Esteva 1992; Ferguson 1994; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Hobart 1993; Sachs 1992). It is a myth that all actors in the development game (donors, intermediary organisations and beneficiaries) must perpetuate in order for the development apparatus to continue functioning. For in the absence of such a unifying, tidying myth, the development project becomes much too complicated.

And so, the intermediary organisations, in their quest for funding, are the architects of the myth that must be drawn up as a plan that makes sense, with clean solutions that will eventuate if certain steps are taken, the necessary funding being the only proviso for the successful outcomes. The beneficiaries are complicit, acting the myth for the donors, so that funding will be forthcoming. And the donors long to believe it, blacking out signs that it may not be true (cf. Blaikie 2000:1038). It is the physical and sociocultural distance between the tiers that facilitate such a conspiracy of misconception, coupled with a certain level of reproduction of the situation envisaged by donors

and intermediaries, on the part of local people. This reproduction occurs in part as an internalisation of the discourse being enacted about them (Foucault 1972; Escobar 1984; 1995), and in part as a strategic move within the game of capital accumulation, the donors and intermediaries bringing in to the coca field certain capital - economic and cultural - that has worth within the *field* and that can be passed on to community members.

However, at the same time that local people enact and internalise these myths, there is a constant process of contestation at play. This is the work of discoursing and counter-discoursing (Foucault 1972; cf. Dirks et al. 1994; Harris 1995; Stephenson 2000), and of forging counter-hegemonies (Gramsci 1971; cf. Scott 1985). While individuals have disparate possibilities for contributing to cultural production according to their situation in terms of the coca production relations, coca growers as a group have a certain leverage afforded them by the relatively powerful position they hold in this respect (Gramsci 1971:12). One thing that resulted from the distance between the tiers and the NGOs' inattention to the communicative ecosystem and political economy, was that they failed to notice and to adapt to the changing political and social environment, whereby those labelled in the myth as 'marginalised' peoples (Ribera 2003:35) had now, after having fought hard for representation, participation and a voice, found a way to enter into formal decision-making processes through election into local government.

It becomes less credible for NGOs to speak of fostering 'participation' in their projects, through meetings and consultations, when the people have surreptitiously been forging their own, much broader, much more important, participation, all of their own accord. The five-hundred year history of power imbalances played out in a struggle over material and cultural production, of which the coca leaf is both a concretely material and a symbolic part, continues to be played out with unsuspecting, good-intentioned NGOs as the main protagonists, and with localised, ineffectual projects as the battle-ground.

## **Methodology**

Development is a multi-sited beast, and so my fieldwork, without my meaning it, became multi-sited as Marcus (1995) and Fischer (2003) would have it (cf. Kurotani 2004). By traversing three different fieldsite levels: that of the foreign (and far away) donors, that of the home-grown intermediary organisations in La Paz and that of the rural people who are the targets or 'beneficiaries' of that international aid, I aimed to be able to trace and understand the various dimensions involved in a development project, the ways in which the players in each of these three field sites understood and perceived their counterparts at the other fieldsite levels, and the power dynamics involved. My fieldwork consisted mainly of participant observation and other ethnographic methods, such as interviews and surveys, with the 'beneficiaries' in Sud Yungas (Hume and Mulcock 2004; Stocking



Jr. 1983; Tacchi et al. 2003a). I also undertook participant observation with the intermediary organisation in La Paz as well as communicating with them via email after entering the Yungas (cf. Fischer 2003; Forte 2002; Hakken 1999).<sup>26</sup> I communicated via email with the Dutch donor NGO, and gained some insights into the operation of this organisation when the coordinator visited Bolivia on two occasions during my fieldwork.

The city, La Paz, is the domain of the intermediary organisations: the NGOs and governmental aid agencies that receive funding from overseas, manage that money and implement the projects for which that money is destined, at the local level. On arriving in Bolivia, I spent six weeks in La Paz, during which time I made contacts with and interviewed various people working in the areas of development, communications and anthropology. It was at a seminar entitled, 'Bolivia, Construction of Democracy and the Information Society' (CRIS Bolivia 2003), that was being held in preparation for the Geneva World Summit for the Information Society, to be held in December of that year (cf. Best et al. 2004; Browne 2004; Klein 2004; Gumucio-Dagron 2005), that I was introduced to the Director of *Alma*, a La Paz-based NGO that had recently opened an Internet telecentre in Chulumani, Sud Yungas. The Director seemed ambivalent, perhaps bemused by my desire to volunteer with his organisation, but the staff member who met me at the office several days later, apologising that the Director had been called out on other business, embraced the concept of a foreign volunteer and all but placed me in charge of the Chulumani telecentre and the school computer room.

So it was that, after spending three weeks undertaking participant observation in the NGO's La Paz office, attending meetings, seeing how they secured funding and how they planned the projects they were given funding to implement, I entered that which was to become my main fieldsite, the Yungas, with two staff members of the NGO. The exotic and violent illness obligatory to any anthropologist's rite of passage fieldwork experience had me holed up in my hotel room for the inauguration of the telecentre courses the other staff members had travelled to give, but only lasted a day. I was in full form to attend the second day of classes and to witness the first meeting of two 'others'; the intermediaries and the 'beneficiaries'. For the following two weeks, I attended and assisted with the introductory Internet courses that NGO staff were offering to local people. The NGO staff then returned home to La Paz, and I remained for 20 months. I rented a room overlooking the town plaza, so that I could keep an eye on the town, and the town could keep an eye on me.

---

<sup>26</sup> See Hakken's (1999) work on undertaking ethnographic fieldwork in 'cyberspace', *Cyborgs @Cyberspace: An Ethnographer Looks to the Future*. Also, Fischer's chapter, 'Worlding Cyberspace: Toward a Critical Ethnography in Space, Time, and Theory' (Fischer 2003:261-308).

## The Methodological Toolkit

Whilst in the Yungas and La Paz, I used a combination of ethnographic research methods. The majority of my time in the Yungas was spent engaging in participant observation activities. In the town, I spent time with people in their shops, in the market, in the plaza, in the disco and bars, cooking or watching television in their homes. I became involved in traditional dance groups and the many *fiestas* and celebrations, as well as attending seminars and conferences on various topics. I also undertook participant observation in the Internet telecentre at the same time as I participated in its administration, and in the local radio station, Radio Yungas, where I learnt about the day-to-day operations of the radio through volunteering as a reporter (adding to the confusion as to my identity and purpose in the Yungas), as a typist of messages for broadcast and as part of the production team.<sup>27</sup> I also undertook trips as part of the work of the radio. In the communities surrounding Chulumani, I spent time with people undertaking daily labour activities in the coca fields and the coffee and fruit orchards, undertaking leisure and everyday activities in their houses, attending community and *sindicato* meetings, school events and *fiestas* and celebrations. An integral part of this participation was listening to the radio programmes and watching the television programmes that others were listening to and watching.

I also undertook some more structured fieldwork, including a survey of over sixty people that asked questions about peoples' communications practices and their experiences with development organisations (see appendices D and E). These surveys were useful mainly for quantifying some of the data that I had already gathered through participant observation, but would not have been trustworthy on their own due to the artificial context in which data were gathered. People, aware that they were under the spotlight, would sometimes ask, 'It's better for you if I say yes, isn't it?' throwing to light the unreliability of this sort of data gathering (while not absolving participant observation of the same sorts of problems). The act of carrying out the surveys, however, also served the function of doing something visible that reminded people of my main purpose as anthropologist. My attempts to employ research assistants to undertake some of these surveys were unsuccessful, a fact that in itself proved enlightening to me. When I asked a young employee of the radio if she knew of anyone who would be suitable, she offered to do it herself. I had initially thought she would be perfect for the job since she spoke Aymara and was undertaking tertiary study, but assumed she would not have the time. This assumption proved correct and no surveys were forthcoming. Another young woman who had recently completed high school was suggested to me, and agreed to assist, but she too was otherwise occupied with the everyday work in her family's coca field. Being a part of a Yungas family unit implies having the obligation to make available your labour on a full-time basis to the family business (a full-time job in the radio of

---

<sup>27</sup> I found it difficult to reconcile the 'ethics' of modern anthropology or social science research (seeking [written] permission to tape-record a conversation and so on), with the more forward and spontaneous behaviour required of a reporter. 'Just hold out the tape-recorder to them and say, "A question for Radio Yungas"', I was told after finding that most people would decline to comment when I gave them the opportunity to do so.



course, is not the norm), and this would prove to be an issue for the recruitment of employees in development projects as well.

Toward the end of my fieldwork, I undertook semi-structured interviews with people who I knew felt comfortable with me, as well as people who worked in communications or development and local leaders, in order to consolidate my data and ask some specific questions. I also asked some people to keep a log of the communications media they used over the period of a week (see appendix F), but this proved difficult for people who, despite being literate, were not accustomed to writing and filling in forms. Again, most of the data gathered in this instance only confirmed what I had discovered through participant observation, but in a skeletal, rather than a full-bodied form.

When I had access to the Internet, I conducted fieldwork in what might be called 'cyber-space', communicating with the intermediary and donor NGOs (Fischer 2003; Forte 2002; Hakken 1999). During the twenty months of fieldwork I also travelled periodically to La Paz, where I attended seminars, and a week-long event involving many activities relating to the commercialisation of coca. I also spent several weeks in La Paz before returning to Australia, during which time I interviewed people and collected literature.

### **The Perils of Applied Anthropology**

I had initially thought that having the backing of some kind of organisation would make my entry into the community easier. This would, I believed, not only make my presence there more legitimate, more official and therefore more acceptable to local people, but it would also give me the opportunity to return something immediate to the community through volunteer work. I would be doing something 'useful' for its own sake, as well as for the sake of my being accepted into the community and for the sake of satisfying my own need to counteract some of the doubt I was feeling about whether I should be going at all into a place to which I had not been invited (cf. Moore 1993:119).<sup>28</sup> However, my association with the NGO had probably as many drawbacks as it had positives. There are three main ones.

To begin with, the word 'NGO' ('ONG' in Spanish)<sup>29</sup> is synonymous with coca eradication, due to some organisations' links with crop substitution projects that reached both their heyday and their fall from grace in the Chulumani area during the 1980s, and continue to operate in other coca-growing areas (Léons 1997, Spedding 2003; 2004). These will be discussed further in the following

---

<sup>28</sup> On conducting fieldwork in Khmer refugee camps in Thailand, Lisa Moore (1993:119) writes, 'I chose to volunteer for a relief agency because organisations can obtain passes for volunteers much more easily than can individual researchers. I felt it was important for me, and for what I wanted to discover, to establish a relationship that involved both giving and receiving. Furthermore, volunteering gave me an easily recognisable function and satisfied my need for an identity beyond that of researcher.'

<sup>29</sup> Alison Spedding refers to 'ONGs' as 'hongos', the Spanish word for mushrooms; a play on words that makes disparaging reference to their rapid proliferation (personal communication).

chapter. Despite the fact that governments were behind the push for these projects, it is perhaps due to the fact that non-governmental organisations often carried out these projects on the ground, that the concept of the NGO has been forever tarnished. As one coca grower said to me in reference to an organisation that had constructed public toilets in his community, 'All these organisations of NGOs are always coming in with lies. They'll never tell the truth – not likely. Because that is the strategy of the North American government.'

It made no difference that the NGO I was associated with was interested only in telecentres ('possibly a front'); some people believed that I had been sent as a spy for the United States (which would have been the case whether or not I was associated with an NGO), and some of those who came to trust me suspected that I (innocent and naive) was unaware of the true motives of the NGO I was working with. I learnt quickly the power of language, and changed the word (research) 'project' on my obligatory 'Participant Consent Forms' to 'thesis', after my neighbours asked in horror, 'What sort of a project are you doing?' 'Project', I learnt, means 'Alternative Development Project', crop substitution and coca eradication.

The second difficulty had to do with the confusion created by my double persona of anthropologist and development worker. Despite my attempts to be open about my primary reason for being in the area (ethnographic research), my volunteer work was more visible and its purpose more tangible and easily understood (cf. Moore 1993:119, 123). Many people got to know me first as 'the girl from the telecentre', even the 'owner' of the telecentre, or the representative of NGO *Alma*, so that when I would wish to undertake surveys, interviews, or other participant observation, people would become confused as to my role, and suspicions would arise. Why had the NGO sent me to collect this information? This was confounded even further by the fact that the foreign donor NGO *Vida*, with whom I worked more closely after NGO *Alma* withdrew from the picture in April 2004, was Dutch and I was Australian. 'The Señorita Nadia is really helping us,' said the General Secretary of one community after I had corrected some misinformation about my origin during a *sindicato* meeting. 'But, you say you are doing your thesis, right? I would like to know, why did you say you were from Holland, and now you've changed, you say you're from Australia?' These sorts of misunderstandings were commonplace.

And thirdly, the other edge of the double-edged sword came into stark relief when things went awry with the NGO I was working with. Promised projects did not eventuate, the telecentre was closed, and I was the only person in town to field the questions and accusations. It became imperative to stress my role as lowly volunteer, not owner of anything, not in possession of much of the information that everyone was after, and certainly not in a position to rectify the situation: to reinstall the telecentre or honour the promised projects. These were some of the problems I encountered during my attempts to practice 'applied anthropology' (cf. Field and Fox 2007; Gardner and Lewis 1996; Viola Recasens 2000:23). The difficulties I would have experienced had I not been affiliated with an organisation remain unknown.

## Reflexivity

My gender and age affected my experience in unexpected ways. On the one hand, I suspect that people were less inclined to take me seriously because of the fact that I was young and female, but on the other hand, perhaps it was these very conditions and the fact that they signify the lower ranks of hierarchical authority, that caused some people to feel less threatened and less inhibited from talking to me. Because of my age, I was befriended by young people and spent more time in the disco and the plaza than in the less salubrious bars.

Contrary to my expectations, it was initially easier to build relationships with men than with women. While the young men and the anthropologists were free to pursue riotous behaviour in the plaza until the wee hours of the night, the women my age were either married with children, in the city studying, or at home with their parents, wisely avoiding the evils of the night. In the communities, my point of entry was usually the local authorities, and these tend to be men. Women also, having often had less formal education and less opportunity to gain the experiences associated with holding a local leadership position, underestimated the contribution they could make to my research and assumed that I would not be interested in talking to them (cf. Ruíz 1994; Mata 1994). When I asked a question, it was often suggested that I speak to their husband, who would be able to answer me better (cf. Moore 1993:123).

Finally, my status as 'outsider' cannot be ignored. Even researchers from the local area become outsiders to a certain extent as soon as they step outside the coca field, study in the city and return on the other side of the investigative fence, but certainly the fact that I was white-skinned, from a 'developed' country, and presumably well-educated and wealthy, only accentuated this divide. This was brought home to me early in my fieldwork during a public town meeting that had been advertised on the radio, where one local leader, Carlos, stood up to speak angrily, first about the corrupt practices of the Mayor, who needed a whipping, and then about myself. 'What is the señorita doing here?' he asked. 'Who is she and who is she working for? If she is studying us, then she should do it from outside; interview the leaders, whatever she has to do, but not come in here' (cf. Conzelman 2007:21-23)<sup>30</sup>.

When I presented myself to him later in a desperate attempt to rectify the situation, he laughed conspiratorially at the idea of my 'thesis' and told me that he and I both knew what I was *really* doing. He smirked when he said that if I really was writing a thesis, then they hoped they would see this thesis when it was ready. He would not hesitate to have me ejected from the community if need be, and I would not be the first. Until then I had only been received with warmth and hospitality and had not understood the true impact that my presence had. While saddening me, he

---

<sup>30</sup> Caroline Conzelman (2007) experienced similar difficulties during her fieldwork across the hills in Coroico at around the same time.

also did me the favour of reminding me of who I was and what I could hope to achieve in terms of becoming a part of this landscape.

I cannot deny that I am susceptible to intimidation, and was particularly sensitive from then on as to where it was appropriate for me to be, forgoing opportunities for data collection in some instances. I was unaware, before arriving, of the town/community (*pueblo/campo*) dichotomy, of which I have made mention above. I made my base in the town and most of my close relationships were initially formed there. As time went by, I spent more time in the communities and built strong relationships there, but was constantly aware of the effect my presence would have there. As Carlos told me, 'You are like a speck of white sand amidst total black. Maybe in a city it's okay. Even in a town. But a community is the most intimate level, do you understand?' For this reason, I have a clearer understanding of the world of the townsfolk than of the world of the *campesinos*, although I have tried to understand both.

On returning to the community of Northern Potosí, Bolivia, where she conducted fieldwork during the 1970s, Olivia Harris (1995:108) wrote:

I am filled with a trepidation that anyone who has done fieldwork in the region will recognise: how far is what I have learnt from them the product of their help and active collaboration, and how far is it in spite of their enduring doubts and suspicions, behind their backs as it were? Will they welcome the book I had told them I would write, or view it as a betrayal?

I hope that when I return to the Yungas with this thesis, I will be absolved of spying, or at least of spying for anyone other than myself, and that I will be forgiven for having produced a document that does not include anything much that the Yungas people did not already know. Of course, it could never really be anything else as, after all, they told me most of what is in here.

## Conclusion

I can only begin to imagine how the landscape of the Yungas must have changed in the two years since I left there. I imagine it will still be green and mountainous, but refer rather to the political, social and communicational landscape. Bolivia now has an indigenous ex-coca grower as President. He has nationalised the country's hydrocarbons and altered the laws pertaining to the legal production of coca (cf. Conzelman 2007). And perhaps more transformative than any of these developments, Yungas people now have mobile phones where previously, most people did not have telephones at all.

Nonetheless, I hope that this story, fixed in space and time, may provide some general insights into a possible path along which development organisations might travel in an attempt to work toward

more relevant development projects, and ones that attempt to redress, rather than reproduce historical inequalities between local people and the outsiders that development organisations and staff represent. These local-outsider relationships are characterised by struggles over the control of both material and cultural resources (coca and discourse), and these two struggles are intertwined, as a person's or a group's potential to influence cultural discourse is tied into a relationship with that person or group's position within the coca production system or coca *field*.

This means that on the one hand, an understanding of the communicative ecology of the area has as its prerequisite an understanding of the coca production system upon which that ecology rests, as the differentiated positions of groups and individuals within that system will lead to differentiated levels of access to use particular communicative tools in particular ways. A project that aims to target an ICT initiative at specific groups will need to be aware of where these groups are situated within the communicative ecosystem and material production system.

On the other hand, development organisations need to approach a potential project and a potential locale as a part of a wider, global and historical political economy with all the connections, disconnections and power relations that this entails. As a part of this approach, the organisation itself is required to be reflexive and consider its own place in this system of power relations. As has been widely argued (cf. Ferguson 1994; Friedman 1992; Hickey and Mohan 2005), the development process is not apolitical, nor is it ahistorical and a debunking of the neat and tidy myths of development not only in theory, but in the practical ways in which projects are implemented as well, may contribute to a development that is more relevant and more sensitive. If this were to occur, perhaps a public toilet to which so many different actors have contributed might inspire in the local community member feelings of pride at a collaborative job well done, rather than feelings of subordination and insecurity.





## 2 YUNGUENOS IN HISTORY AND THE WORLD: HISTORICAL RELATIONS OF MATERIAL AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

NOTE: This figure is included on page 47 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

**FIGURE 7: Participant carrying *wiphala* during Radio Yungas' 26<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations, Chulumani.** (Photo by author, July 2004).

They've just sent back a whole lot of Bolivians from Spain. They stole all our gold and everything, and now they won't even let us into their country. They came and they left us their bad seed. I prefer to be descended from the Incas. I'm embarrassed to be descended from the Spanish. During the time of the Incas, everything was good. There was law and order. If you did something wrong, they killed you. They governed well. They knew everything, they say. But the Spanish brought us the word of God, at least. That's the only good thing they brought us.

(Carolina, Chulumani)

They think that only they want to have the power. Somewhere in the United States they are trying to cultivate coca and it doesn't work because they don't know how to do it. That's one reason. The other reason is that the land won't accept coca cultivation. That was in the news. They even took llamas from here, from the Andes. That which is so Bolivian, with so much wool, and over there where it's so hot. Now they want to take the gas. They think we are all stupid, but now we have studied a little as well, you know? So we know that we should industrialise the gas... The United States want to take the gas from here as a primary resource, make the derivatives there, and then we have to buy back our own industrialised gas. They want to do the same thing with coca. With the derivatives of coca... we could become rich. The United States don't want us to.

(Benjamin, Sud Yungas coca-growing community)

All these organisations of NGOs are coming in here with lies. They will never tell the truth – not likely. Because that's the strategy of the North American government... We are always paternalised, we're manipulated, we're puppets for all these people. That is the worst misfortune of our people.

(Alonso, Sud Yungas coca-growing community)

## Cultural Plunderers – An Introduction

It was not to be flippantly dismissed when Chilean President Ricardo Lagos presented rock superstar Bono with a *charango* on a recent tour to his country. He presented it as an ‘Andean guitar,’ my Bolivian husband told me, when ‘everyone knows that the *charango* is Bolivian.’ Of course, the outraged Bolivians did not have the opportunity to combat the situation with a gift of their own, as the only superstars to place Bolivia on their tour schedule are of the decaying variety. The best place to catch an Air supply gig, or Men at Work, reformed after an eighteen year holiday, is Bolivia. The Chileans, who have a reputation within Bolivia for plundering others’ national icons (a traditional dance known as the ‘Diablada’ and Bolivia’s only stretch of coastline, among others) are not alone in their notoriety, as the quotes above suggest.

This chapter will place the people of the Yungas within the wider framework of Bolivia and the world, to discuss the relationships – political, economic and social – of which they have been a part throughout recorded history (cf. Lesser 1985:92; Geertz 1963; Mintz 1985; Wolf 1982). It will become clear that the Yungueños experience a long history of unequal relationships between them and outsiders, which despite the shifting political and economic circumstances over the years and the apparent succession of different foes (Spanish, national elites predominantly descended from the Spanish, the United States government, NGOs), are understood to form a historical continuity of dominance by *blanco* and *mestizo* outsiders (cf. Gill 2000:54; Harris 1995:110-1; Rasnake 1989:13; Spedding 1996:26).<sup>31</sup> This continuity can be found in the constant centring around two interconnected struggles, the first having to do with the control of the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of material resources, (be they minerals, coca or telecommunications), and the other with the control of cultural resources or cultural products, meaning the production of discourses, values and identities (Foucault 1972,<sup>32</sup> cf. Harris 1995:106<sup>33</sup>). I use the concept of discourse here because of the attention it pays to power relations and the ways in which discursive practices form objects, so that people who are the objects of discourse begin to act, think and feel in certain ways according to what is being said or done about them or to them (Foucault 1972:49; Escobar 1995:111). For the Yungueños, coca is at the centre of both of these struggles.

The cultural resources mentioned, whose production may require the use of such symbols as coca or *charangos*, are produced via processes pertaining to a communications system that is intrinsically related to the material resources. I will refer to this communications system as the

---

<sup>31</sup> Spedding (1996:26) writes of the ‘myth of the conquest’ as a typical origin myth, which establishes the origin and explanation of ‘how things are now’ and involves a rupture between an idyllic, mythical time, and the current day.

<sup>32</sup> See Chapter One for a discussion of Foucauldian discourses. They are defined as ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault 1972:49), meaning the production of knowledge and the accompanying practice, and the power relations that inhere in such knowledge and practice (Weedon 1987:111).

<sup>33</sup> Harris (1995:106), who undertook ethnography in the *altiplano* of Bolivia, writes, ‘The metaphor of imperialism is mined for images of plunder and extraction. In the sixteenth century, it was the Spanish who looted and destroyed the treasures, the skills and the accumulated wisdom of Andean civilization. In the twentieth century, it is the gringos who steal, purchase, appropriate both archaeological pieces and historical knowledge, stored so often in archives across the ocean.’

'ecosystem of coca communications' (cf. Tacchi et al. 2003a; Hearn and Foth 2007a),<sup>34</sup> and argue that the nature of this communicative ecosystem is a result of the characteristics of the material, in this case coca, production system. This is akin to Keane (1994), who argues that economic transformations, such as increased integration into commodity markets, or socio-political changes, such as a change in the local administrative structure, can have consequences for non-economic matters such as the way in which goods are articulated with other systems of signs, values and powers (Keane 1994:606, 623; cf. Keane 1997; Healy and Paulson 2000).<sup>35</sup> More than this, I argue that the processes of cultural production that take place via the ecosystem of coca communications feed back to influence the nature of the relations of coca production, making the relationship cyclical.

Quoted above, Alonso, an ex-miner who migrated to the Yungas after the closure of the state mines in the 1980s, and Benjamin, recently migrated from the *altiplano* and the father of Warita, whom we met in the preceding chapter, accompanied hundreds of others who travelled in trucks and buses to join in a nation-wide protest against the government in October 2003. Specifically, they were protesting against the MNR<sup>36</sup> government's sale of natural gas and oil under arrangements highly favourable to multinational exploration companies that left the Bolivian people with few returns (Kohl and Farthing 2006:173). But it is a heightened awareness of the injustices that have been suffered over many years that have led in recent times to an increase in civil unrest, most dramatically played out in the 'Water War' of 2000, a reaction to the MNR's decision to privatise Cochabamba's municipal water system (Albro 2005:249; Kohl and Farthing 2006:162-167; Komadina 2001:101), and the events of October 2003 (*Octubre Negro*) that ended with over seventy people being shot dead by the Bolivian military (Kohl and Farthing 2006:3-4) before then President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada fled northward in a helicopter.

The selling off of Bolivia's state-owned enterprises that began in 1985 was part of the government's decision to embrace the neoliberal development orthodoxy being advocated worldwide, in compliance with International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan conditions (Albro 2005:249; Kohl and Farthing 2006:65).<sup>37</sup> These shifts, led and conditioned by 'outsiders', signalled for the majority of

---

<sup>34</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, these writers employ the concept of 'communicative ecologies' as a way of studying social and technological communications systems in a communication for development context. I refer to 'communicative ecology' as the study of 'communicative ecosystems'.

<sup>35</sup> In a volume of the *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* [5(2)] dedicated to the constitutional and legislative reforms enacted in Bolivia between 1993 and 1997, Healy and Paulson (2000) and other scholars draw the link between political economies and personal identities.

<sup>36</sup> *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* or Nationalist Revolutionary Movement. See footnote 19, page 22 for more detail on the evolution of this political party since the agrarian revolution it headed in 1952. See also Heath (1973) and Klein (1969).

<sup>37</sup> In 1987, Paz Estenssoro's government accepted IMF guidelines that left two-thirds of all export income free for foreign debt repayments. The United States renewed its credit arrangements with Bolivia in line with the IMF, partly as it saw this as an opportunity to launch a military intervention whose aim was to stem the production of coca (Kohl and Farthing 2006:67). The reforms of the 1980s followed the recipe of orthodox neoliberal reforms as advocated by the World Bank and the IMF. These included the closure of the state mines, devaluation of the exchange rate, removal of price controls and public subsidies, cuts in public spending in the areas of health and education, tax reforms and reformed trade legislation to facilitate exportation. The privatisations of the 1990s were a continuation of this process (Albro 2005:265). See Klein (1969:405), who discusses an earlier return to orthodox monetary policies in Bolivia, Kohl and Farthing's (2006) recent book on the consequences of neoliberal policies in Bolivia, Healy and Paulson (2000), who discuss Bolivia's neoliberal reforms in

the Bolivian people a repetition of history, with them the eternal losers. In taking to the streets to assert ownership over what they see as resources rightfully belonging to the Bolivian people, they assert at the same time the right to exercise control over processes of cultural production, as discourses are created and sustained about indigenous Bolivians and their place in the world, past and present (cf Albro 2005).<sup>38</sup> The Yungueños participate in cultural production through public protests, discussion in seminars and on the radio, everyday conversation and traditional coca chewing practices. For them, coca is at the centre of the power struggles, both material and cultural, that they have experienced over the years and continue to experience.

Divided into four parts, this chapter will undertake an exploration of the struggle for control over the coca leaf as a material commodity throughout history, and the associated struggle over the production of cultural discourses. The first part deals with relations of coca production up until the mid-twentieth century. It begins with a discussion of what is known of the relations of production toward the end of the reign of the Incas, and the changes that occurred after the Spanish occupation. Patterns of land ownership and trade of the coca leaf during the time of the *haciendas* will be discussed, and the implications of this for the current-day social and class structure in the Yungas. The second section will deal with the production of cultural discourses associated with the relations of coca production, treating the use of the coca leaf in the creation of discourses about indigenous people from the time of the Spanish Conquest. I will discuss the implications of the structure of the hacienda system and relations of production, in terms of indigenous people's ability to exercise acts of cultural production, and the changes that occurred after the Agrarian Reform of 1953.<sup>39</sup>

The third and fourth sections will shift the focus to the continuation of these struggles in the twentieth century, enacted as they are through the United States' War on Drugs, aimed at curbing its domestic use of cocaine through exterminating the supply side, and through Alternative Development projects aimed at substitution of the coca crop. The struggle over cultural production that occurs throughout these processes, with the coca leaf as protagonist, will be discussed. Finally, I will turn to the implications of development organisations' involvement in these processes for those wishing to implement development projects in the Yungas today. As will become clear, due to their past involvement with coca eradication programmes, development organisations have come to represent for local people the outsiders or the aggressors in these historical and continuing power equations.

---

the context of the relationship between these economic changes and the development of ethnic and gender identities, and on neoliberal orthodoxy more generally, Kothari and Minogue (2001) and Peet (2003).

<sup>38</sup> In his discussion of Cochabamba's 'Water War', Albro (2005:262) highlights how middle-class labour leader Oscar Olivera, who became international spokesman for Bolivia's 'water warriors', found it useful to link the Water War to an 'indigenous movement'.

<sup>39</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, while I adopt Bourdieu's ideas of field, capital and habitus to discuss modes of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993; Hesmonhalgh 2006), my definition of cultural production is somewhat broader than his, including the generation of meanings, values and discourse, which in turn have implications for practice. See Durham and Kellner (2006:x) for a similar concept.

# Yungas as Material Battle-Ground: The Historical Fight for Control of the Sacred Leaf

## A Brief History of a Prized Commodity, from Inca Landlords to Spanish Landlords

Doña Arabela and Don Sergio are having a late lunch at home with their small son who does not like school. Their hands are stained red from the wine they used this afternoon to *ch'allar* (bless) their coca field as is done every year at this time, and white from *platano*, the starchy cooking bananas that leave a particularly stubborn, sticky substance on those unfortunates whose job it is to peel them. At the moment, Doña Arabela and Don Sergio are planting a new field that will have its first harvest one year later. They will have to look after it carefully, weed it and kill the bugs. Doña Arabela tells me that if 'they' come to eradicate the coca, 'we' will be left with nothing. All eyes fall upon the small boy, intent on his food, as she murmurs, 'We would have to eat our children', and the child looks up, feigning wide-eyed fear, before his mother breaks into hearty peals of laughter.

When Pizarro and his band of hopeful conquistadors arrived unannounced on South American soil in the sixteenth century, they would have found the production and consumption of coca to be an entrenched and important aspect of local culture and civilisation, with the local producers of the leaf already entwined, as are Doña Arabela, Don Sergio and their unfortunate son, in power relations with others from far beyond their immediate locality. The leaf's first use is said to be traceable to as early as 3000BC (Painter, 1994:1), although reports differ.<sup>40</sup> There is contention over whether or not coca existed beneath a state monopoly during the time of the Incas (Allen 1988:220; Carter and Mamani 1986:70-71; Martindale 1886:5; Mortimer 1901:151-152), but Sanabria (1993: 38-39) claims that as the Incas extended their empire, they took control of the coca fields and imposed tribute levies on those growing the crop.

Antonil (1978) believes that while the Inca policy-makers in Cuzco may have had the intention and the ideal of creating a monopoly over the coca crop, they had not yet managed to implement this throughout the entire empire by the time the Spanish arrived (Antonil 1978:55), and that many non monopolistic tendencies in the organisation of the coca trade can be found during the Inca period and also after the Spanish conquest (ibid.:51). Initially it seems that the Inca bureaucracy, after conquering a new territory, did little more than charge a percentage of the independent growers' coca as a tribute to the empire, whilst leaving the indigenous production system intact (ibid.:54). However, there are also historical records of state-controlled Inca plantations in which people

---

<sup>40</sup> Carter and Mamani (1986:69) write that archaeological remains of the leaf have been found in coastal Peru dating back to 1500BC and that gold and ceramic figures depicting humans with balls of coca in their cheeks have been found in Tiwanaku, Bolivia, dating to 400AD. Rivera (2005:24) writes of pots and statuettes representing coca, and coca chewing implements found in south-western Ecuador as early as 2100BC.



worked exclusively for the Inca, on state-owned land and in the capacity of a state-organised labour force (cf. Rostworowski de Diez Canseco 1999:184-188).<sup>41</sup> Antonil writes:

With the means of production – in this case, coca bushes – held firmly in the hands of an absentee landowning class, it would not be unfair to say that the Inca system replaced a simple redistributive mechanism with a particularly original form of state capitalism, thereby giving birth to the first true rural proletariat in South America.

(1978:55)

Carter and Mamani (1986:71) enter the debate, writing that there is evidence that in a large percentage of the areas dominated by the Incas, coca fields owned by individual producers existed alongside community-owned lands and lands whose yield was destined exclusively for the Inca rulers. They write that local people were granted the land in usufruct in exchange for their loyalty, as a way of effectively incorporating newly conquered peoples into the empire. In any case, nowadays there is no animosity held toward the Incas, who on the contrary are remembered glowingly, as demonstrated by Carolina's quote at the beginning of this chapter. In fact, few of the people currently living in the Yungas are likely to be directly descended from those who were harvesting for the Inca at that time. Although little historical or archaeological work has been done on this, it is believed that groups of Aymara were forcibly relocated to the Yungas from the *altiplano* during the latter years of the Inca empire, and during relocation, they drove the Lecos, the original inhabitants, northward (Heath 1973:76).<sup>42</sup>

Since that time and into the present day, there has been much migration from the *altiplano* to the more fruitful Yungas, and there was also a considerable immigration of Peruvian men to replace the Bolivians who perished during the Chaco War with Paraguay in the 1930s (Colque and Spedding n.d.:19).<sup>43</sup> But the important thing here is to understand how contemporary Yungas residents envisage their past, and why. In this reality, their current precarious economic and social situation is due to a history of inequalities that began with the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century and continues to the present day. Benjamin, who has as yet been unsuccessful in his quest to secure a piece of land of his own and make his fortune in the Yungas, says to me as he sits in the doorway of the *pensión* (eatery) he and his wife have opened next to my room overlooking Chulumani's plaza:

We would have been a rich country. We have everything... Here we have everything; the gas is sitting in the ground and we don't know how to make the most of it. We had

---

<sup>41</sup> For a Marxist analysis of the Inca Empire in the sixteenth century, see Godelier (1977).

<sup>42</sup> Others suggest that there were Aymara-speakers inhabiting the Yungas before the arrival of the Incas, although there is no solid evidence (Spedding 2004:80).

<sup>43</sup> Rivera (1994:Chapter 2, p2) writes, 'In the Yungas, even the most "native" (*originario*) are immigrants, having arrived in who knows what wave from a distant or recent period. That which in common language is designated "legitimate Yungueño", for example, is nothing more than a genealogical memory of three generations; very short to describe someone as "native"!

silver, the *Cerro Rico*. With that alone we would have become a rich country. But the Spanish took everything. We ended up with nothing.

When the Spanish arrived on the scene, they took control of the coca plantations, as well as the lucrative silver and gold mines of Potosí, both of which were worked by indigenous people and Africans brought to the continent as slaves (Angola Maconde 2003:3).<sup>44</sup> Mortimer (1901:157) writes that by 1573, Potosí had the appearance of a great city, as workers were brought from all over the country to satiate the labour needs of the mine.<sup>45</sup> Many tonnes of silver and gold were shipped back to the King in Spain, so that today little remains of *Cerro Rico*, said to have been a solid hill of silver (Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:34; Nash 1979). Six million workers are said to have perished under the terrible working conditions of the mines (Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:34; cf. Angola Maconde 2003:4), and today Potosí is one of the poorest cities of the Americas (Kohl and Farthing 2006:3).

The Spanish also set about expanding coca production to previously unused areas (Sanabria 1993:39), and, already in the 1540s, coca was considered the single most important agricultural product in the Andes. The conquistadors found it useful to emphasize the previous existence of an Inca coca monopoly, whether or not one did exist, as this gave credibility to their quest to confiscate the Inca plantations in the name of the Crown, and then distribute these properties to the leading citizens of the new colony (Antonil 1978:56). Aymara people worked on these *haciendas* under the control of the Spanish *patrones* (*hacienda* landlords), until 1953, when nation-wide agrarian reform followed a bloody revolution the previous year.

### **Patterns of Land Ownership and Trade during the *Hacienda* Period and Implications for the Social Structure of Today's Yungas**

---

<sup>44</sup> 10 million slaves are said to have been brought from Africa to the Americas between 1505 and 1888 with probably 2 million perishing during the journey. Documents exist certifying some of the places of origin of these slaves as Senegal, Guinea, Angola, Congo and Brazil. Those whose journey ended in Bolivia were brought for the specific purpose of working the mines at Potosí, and many perished under the harsh conditions, unaccustomed to the cold and the 4200m altitude above sea level (Angola Maconde 2003:3-6). After being freed, many of those who survived moved to the warmer climes of the Yungas and now live in communities that are still characterised by being predominantly 'Afro-Bolivian', despite there having been much *mestizaje* (mixing) with the Aymara population since that time. Afro-Bolivian women continue to wear the traditional *pollera* (skirt), and the community members share the customary practices associated with coca production and consumption with other Yungas populations (cf. Spedding 1996:36). Afro-Bolivians are aware of the inferior position they continue to occupy in the Bolivian social strata, and while I was in Chulumani, a seminar titled 'Pre-dialogo 2004, Movimiento Cultural Saya Afroboliviano' (Pre-dialogue 2004, Saya Afrobolivian Cultural Movement) was held as part of a project being undertaken by the La Paz-based group Saya Afroboliviano, whose Afro members now reside in the city, to ensure that Afro-Bolivians were to be taken into account in the then forthcoming Constituent Assembly. While I did spend some time in one of the Afro communities of the Irupana area, this thesis focuses largely on the Aymara communities in the Chulumani area, so that while Afro-Yungueños share many of the concerns and grievances of other Yungueños, and some different ones, I make little mention of them throughout the thesis. I apologise to them if this amounts to contributing to what Juan Angola Maconde (2003:6) calls the 'total invisibility' that is constructed around Afro-Bolivian people by the State. See also Landaveri (2003) on the situation of Afro-American women in Latin America.

<sup>45</sup> Gumucio-Dagron (2001a:34) writes that in 1625, Potosí had a larger population than London or Paris and more churches than any other city in the Americas. See also Angola Maconde (2003).

Because of the Yungas valleys' proximity to the capital, most of the Aymara communities fell under the control of *hacienda* landlords during the colonial period and remained so up until the Agrarian Reform of 1953 (CIPCA 1976:26). However, in the Chulumani area, there remained a good number of autonomous communities, now known as *comunidades originarias* (original or native communities).<sup>46</sup> A study done by CIPCA<sup>47</sup> in 1976 speculates that ties between newly settled communities in the Yungas at the time of their relocation, and their original communities (*ayllus*)<sup>48</sup> in the *altiplano* would have been quick to erode (CIPCA 1976:25), and that several factors, including a high death rate due to the tropical diseases to which the newcomers were unaccustomed, and migration between the Yungas and the *altiplano*, would have led to a rapid turnover rate of people living in these communities. They believe that this, in turn, would have led to an individualist mentality and a lesser incidence of community cohesion than was to be found in the *altiplano*.<sup>49</sup> At least since the beginning of the Republic in 1825, land ownership in these communities has been very much individualised, in contrast to that of the communities of the *altiplano*, and made up of individual properties known as *sayañas* that could be bought and sold freely on an open market system (CIPCA 1976:5; Colque and Spedding n.d:19; Spedding 2004:81).<sup>50</sup>

On those landholdings appropriated by the Spanish, the *hacendados* (hacienda landlords, also referred to as *patrón*) enjoyed a monopoly over land rights, and consequently over much of the agricultural surplus.<sup>51</sup> In 1830, large-scale Yungas property owners organised themselves into a powerful group called SPY (Proprietors' Society of the Yungas), an organisation that enjoyed a special relationship with the Bolivian government due to the considerable income the state received through coca taxes (Lema 1997:90). Nonetheless, the small population and high death rate in the Yungas area meant that the *hacendados* needed to make certain concessions to their workers in order to secure the sufficient labour force needed to operate their large extensions of coca. This

---

<sup>46</sup> In 1928 there were thought to have been 118 *haciendas* and 28 *comunidades originarias* in Sud Yungas, with 11 of these *haciendas* and 6 of the *comunidades originarias* in the Chulumani area (CIPCA 1976:6).

<sup>47</sup> CIPCA, The Centre of Investigations and Promotion of *Campesinos* (*Centro de Investigaciones y Promoción del Campesinado*) is a Bolivian research organisation headed by anthropologist Xavier Albó.

<sup>48</sup> Klein (1993:58) writes that the Aymara term *ayllu* originally denoted a 'group of families claiming a common identity through real and fictive kinship and using that claim to hold communal land rights' (cf. Godelier 1977:63). It is thought to have been after the Spanish conquest that the term came to be used more synonymously with the European definition of community, whereby a village formed the nucleus to contiguous land areas, as opposed to land and dwellings being disperse, as was previously the case (Klein 1993:58-9). Today, the term is commonly used to refer to an indigenous community of between 200 and 500 inhabitants in the *altiplano* that is governed by traditional models of organisation (Spedding and Llanos 1999:1). Recently, there has been a push to reinstate the recognition of these organisational systems and accompanying cultural values, as illustrated by the formation of such organisations as CONAMAQ, the National Council of *Ayllus* and *Markas* of Collasuyu (Bolivia) (*Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu*). Yungas inhabitants consider themselves to live in communities, and not *ayllus*, and this is sometimes cited as an example of their 'loss of culture.' One man told me, 'The *sindicatos* are going to go back to being *ayllus*. Before, everything was *ayllus*. The *jilakata* (elected leader) was in charge of everything. There was no hunger. The Mallku (Felipe Quispe) has already formed an Association of *Ayllus*. The Federation of *Campesinos* will be left behind. That's what's going to happen.' See also Untoja's (2001) book, 'Retorno al Ayllu' ('Return to the Ayllu').

<sup>49</sup> Spedding and Llanos (1999:1-4) point out, however, that like Yungas communities, *ayllus* in the *altiplano* today are not as cohesive or as strictly communal as is suggested by some scholars, and perhaps never were.

<sup>50</sup> Santamaria (1983:3) contends that prior to the tupamarista uprising of 1780, most coca fields in the Yungas were in the hands of communities. After the uprising, these were partially displaced by *haciendas*, so that in 1786, 345 Chulumani sector *haciendas* were in the hands of 253 Spanish and *mestizos*. He writes that 24 *haciendas* controlled 44% of the workforce and the *haciendas* produced 89% of the coca. See Herbert Klein (1993) for a thorough study of *haciendas* and *ayllus* in Chulumani in the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>51</sup> For comparison, see Deere (1990) on the control over land and labour enjoyed by the landlord class during *hacienda* times in Peru, and the resultant class and household relations.

meant affording them access to their own land in usufruct and to permanent cultivations that they could exploit on their days off and sell on the market (CIPCA 1976:26; Heath 1973:90).

Workers on the *haciendas* were either *peones*, who were given small pieces of land in usufruct, or *arrenderos*, who were somewhat better off, being able to buy usufruct land from previous *arrenderos*. Such purchases were made between *campesinos* and without the intervention of the *hacendado*, although they still included work obligations on the *hacienda* (Colque and Spedding n.d.: Chapter 3, p.2).<sup>52</sup> According to Spedding (2004:66), the *colonos* (people who lived and worked on the *hacienda*) were obliged to work the communal lands of the *hacienda* three days of the week, whilst the remaining days could be used to work their own usufruct land. On that land, they would cultivate subsistence goods and coca, and any excess after personal use could be sold or exchanged. If additional work needed to be done on the *hacienda*, a *jornal* (a day's wage) would be paid. In this way, both members of *comunidades originarias* and those who worked on the *haciendas* were able to commercialise their coca as individual market players (CIPCA 1976:26). As Spedding and Llanos point out, the Yungas has been integrated into the market since the sixteenth century, coca being one of the first Andean products to be fully mercantilised (Spedding and Llanos 1999:7, cf. Klein 1993:58). Soux de Wayar outlines the way in which all sectors of society were involved in the coca trade in some way:

Despite the fact that the consumption of coca was situated in the popular classes, in its production and trade, the whole of society intervened: the oligarchy as owners of *haciendas* and exportation houses, the middle class as merchants and owners of small properties, and the indigenous class as producers in their *sayañas*, merchants on a small scale and, above all, consumers.

(n.d.:3)

The relations of trade were very much divided along ethnic lines, laying the basis for an ethnically divided class system whose implications are felt in the present day.<sup>53</sup> The exporters were Spanish or foreigners, the regional *mayoristas* or large-scale merchants were *mestizo*, while the small merchants, or *minoristas* were indigenous (Soux de Wayar n.d.:2).<sup>54</sup> The large-scale *hacendados*

---

<sup>52</sup> Colque and Spedding (n.d.:Chapter 3, p.2) refer here to the testimony of Felipa Calle, who bought land as an *arrendero* during *hacienda* days. Her testimony has been recorded in Spedding and Colque (2003). Contrarily, Heath (1973:96), who worked in the Nor Yungas (North Yungas) area, writes that the *arrenderos*, rather than being better off, were *colonos* (tenants) of *colonos*, meaning that they served the *colonos* in return for usufruct land, in the same way that the *colonos* served the *hacendado*. The *colono* hence enjoyed a certain amount of power over the *arrendero*, similarly to the way a family has power today over an *utawawa*, a person without land who lives with and works for a family of *campesinos*, in exchange for food and board and perhaps some pay.

<sup>53</sup> Santamaria (1983:1) writes that it was between the tupamarista revolution of 1780 and the War of Independence of 1825 that vast sectors of the population who were not previously involved with coca began to take advantage of the trade. Smaller merchants, including Spanish, *mestizo*, foreigners and indigenous people were inserted into the traditional system of *trueque* (exchange), which extended throughout the whole Andean world. He also writes that the revolution produced a substitution of communal properties for individual properties (ibid.:4). At this time also, many merchants, civil servants and clergymen appeared as *hacendados*, at least half of whom were absentee landlords (ibid.:7).

<sup>54</sup> 'Exportation' includes areas that would once have been regions of Alto Peru (now Bolivia) and therefore part of the traditional coca trade route, as well as places as far away as Hamburg. Interestingly, Bolivia imported cocaine manufactured in Germany for medicinal purposes, having decided that the country did not have the capital to invest in its industrialisation (Soux de Wayar n.d.:2).

would generally sell some of their agricultural surplus to the *colonos* in a system of debt-bondage, while the majority would be sold on to wholesalers in La Paz who would supply regional and international markets.<sup>55</sup> Another section of the produce would be sold to intermediary merchants in the provincial capital, who would sell some to local townspeople, and the rest on to the same wholesalers in La Paz. These intermediaries were able to charge more than the *hacendados* by waiting for an opportune moment to sell (Heath 1973:92). Large-scale commercialisation of products then, was in the hands of a few: the (Spanish) *hacendados*, and important (Spanish or *mestizo*) *vecinos*<sup>56</sup> from the main towns (CIPCA 1976:27; Santamaria 1983:6).

The indigenous *minoristas*, meanwhile, continued to follow a trade circuit that had its origins in the kingdom of the Aymaras, with coca still being transported along small trails via mule and donkey until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Santamaria 1983:5). These *minoristas* probably took their produce straight to the consuming centres or the main towns, to be bought by an intermediary and distributed (*ibid.*). Spedding (2004:59) writes that the *campesinos* did not have sufficient capital to make long trips, and so both *colonos* who sold the extra coca they cultivated on their usufruct lands, and peasants from the *comunidades originarias*, sold directly to *rescatadores* (intermediaries) who came to the Yungas mostly from the *altiplano* to trade *ch'arki* (dried meat) and cheese for coca.

Santamaria (1983:2), writes that the traditional system of exchanging goods between the different ecological zones limited the *campesinos'* insertion into the monetary system, and what little profit they made would probably go to a monetary tribute they were obliged to pay (*ibid.*). However, perhaps it is this very system that favoured them.<sup>57</sup> Spedding (2004:59) documents how between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the amount of coca being produced by *campesinos* (whether those attached to an *hacienda*, or those from the *comunidades originarias*) gradually overtook the amount produced by the *haciendas*, despite the fact that the latter should have had a certain advantage, since they disposed of free labour, had more capital, and were also taxed less than the *campesinos* (*ibid.*:60). To Spedding (*ibid.*), this suggests that there are intrinsic aspects in the productive process of coca that make it more profitable when it is developed upon the basis of *campesino*, rather than feudal or capitalist relations of production (cf. Wolf 1966). She writes that 'the coca-growers are a successful example of the integration of the *campesino* organisation of production, with the market,' and cites the way in which *campesinos* have combined their traditional reciprocal labour system (*ayni*) with paid labour (*minga*) as an example of their ability to incorporate both the market and traditional and communal labour patterns into their productive system, without the former destroying the latter (Spedding 2004:343; cf. Klein 1993:110). Antonil points out that

---

<sup>55</sup> Some *patrones* even had a shop with provisions on the *hacienda*, through which they were able to recuperate any monetary payments that had been made to the *colonos* (Colque and Spedding n.d:19).

<sup>56</sup> Traditional Chulumani residents, as opposed to those who have come from the communities to settle there more recently. They are middle or upper-class and *blanco* or *mestizo*, and are often the descendants of *hacendados*.

<sup>57</sup> Spedding (1994:93-94) outlines how the topography and the steep hills of the Yungas mean that different altitudes for cultivation exist in close proximity, and this has traditionally facilitated an exchange of goods between the different altitudes – mandarines, oranges, bananas, chillies, coffee and coca from the lower altitudes are exchanged for potatoes, *chuño* (naturally freeze-dried potato), *tunta*, *mote* (corn), *ch'arki* (dried meat), fish and cheese from the higher valleys or *altiplano*.



there has always persisted a certain level of autonomy within at least part of the coca trade, even throughout the period of the Spanish *hacienda*, and writes:

Though the traditional pattern may only have survived in a transformed and marginalised state, it does serve as an encouraging object lesson in the Andean people's resistance to dubious and alien blueprints of economic efficiency.

(1978:60)

What is of interest to this discussion are the implications that these historical circumstances have for Yungas people today. As will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter, a combination of events has led to a system of land ownership and trade patterns that are highly individualised, with individual *campesinos* working to maximise their capital gains within the market, but calling upon a traditional and reciprocal labour system in order to achieve this. Traditional trade routes are intact to a certain extent, and the division of labour and class that was ethnically based still continues to underpin society, if not wholly in practical terms, then at least in the contemporary imagination (cf. Barnes 1954:45). Alongside and as part of these productive systems, processes of cultural production have occurred that continue to have resonance today. It is to these that I now turn.

## **Yungas as Cultural Battleground: The Creation of Cultural and Coca Discourses**

### **Cultural Implications of the System of Land Ownership and Trade of the *Hacienda* Era**

Heath (1973:79-80) has written that during the *hacienda* period, *campesinos* were part of a 'distinctive local socio-cultural system with no direct access to regional or national institutions of education, government or commerce'. He contends that most of the social contact that they had was with others on the *hacienda*, and that dealings with the outside world were mediated via the *hacendado*, who often took an active role in settling disputes, sanctioning marriage or divorce, and even speaking on behalf of a *colono* who may have fallen foul of the law.<sup>58</sup> *Hacendados* had relative autonomy to deal with their charges as they wished, which Heath (1973:80) attributes on the one hand to the disinterest of government officials toward the indigenous people, and their respect for the *hacendados'* authority, and on the other hand to the lack of transport and communication between the Yungas and the rest of the world. While this picture of social and commercial isolation is perhaps a little more drastic than that painted by other scholars (cf.

---

<sup>58</sup> Heath (1973:76), who studied in Nor Yungas, writes that in contrast to most areas of the country, many *hacendados* made their homes in the comfortable climes of the Yungas, while Colque and Spedding (n.d.:Chapter 3, p19), who studied in Sur Yungas, write that it was only on the smallest *haciendas* that the *hacendado* was likely to live there and deal directly with the *colonos*. They write that most of the time, dealings would be through a *mayordomo* appointed to be in charge of the workers.



Spedding 2004:59), there was nonetheless a marked difference between the cultural autonomy exercised by those who lived on the *comunidades originarias*, and those who lived on the *haciendas* and were materially dependent on the *hacendado*.

Throughout the *hacienda* period, the *comunidades originarias* continued to elect a *jilaqata*, the traditional leader of the Aymara *ayllu*, through an equitable rotating leadership system. They had traditional staffs of office that were said to be incrustated with gold (Colque and Spedding n.d.:Chapter 3, p20) and their job was to regulate the social coexistence at community meetings. During festive times, the *jilaqata* would wander through the community playing traditional music and offering drinks to the *comunarios* (community members). Meanwhile, on the *haciendas*, *jilaqatas* were elected by the *hacendado* and acted as intermediaries, passing orders between the *mayordomo* (appointed to manage the workers) and the *colonos*.<sup>59</sup> Their staffs of office were said to be poor in comparison to those of the *comunidades originarias* (ibid.). The *comunarios* looked down upon those who lived on the *haciendas*, calling them 'esclavos del patrón' (slaves of the patrón) and scorning their straw-roofed houses, while the *comunarios* lived in solid houses with tiled roofs and balconies (Colque and Spedding n.d.:Chapter 3, p19). The differences between *hacienda* and *comunidad originaria* can still be felt today, more than fifty years after the decline of the *hacienda*, as illustrated by Carlos in the following quote:

The *comunidades originarias* have always demonstrated their cultural activities. Like my community, which is a *comunidad originaria*, they've always been able to go out and dance, etc. In other communities, such as Comunidad 'A', they started to dance, and the *patrón* whipped them. That's why, in those communities, right up until today, if they see a white person, like you, they shake with fear. They're scared. On the other hand, I've never been afraid, I'll tell you straight, because I am your equal. In the *comunidades originarias*, they still have their autoctonous manifestations intact: their dances, etc. In other communities, they don't.

Spedding (2004:89) describes how those who belong to *comunidades originarias* feel themselves to be the representatives and guardians of the traditional coca cultivation methods, but also how they have tended to have more contact with non-*campesino* groups and as a result, have more knowledge of the Spanish language and national laws.<sup>60</sup> Some people from these communities were astute enough to have their children figure as *blanco* or *mestizo* on their baptism certificates, in order to enable them to attend school in Chulumani even before 1930. Spedding (2004:90) writes that today, those from the *comunidades originarias* are more likely to become professionals, more likely to migrate, and more often engage in paid work than those from the *ex-haciendas*.

---

<sup>59</sup>The *mayordomo* was appointed by the *hacendado* to supervise the workers, and carried out most of the tasks of disciplining and punishing the workers since the *hacendado* was usually absent. The person appointed was likely to be a local person from the town who could be classified as '*blanco menor*' ('minor white') (Colque and Spedding n.d.:Chapter 3, p19; Spedding 2004:82). Spedding also refers to this class of people as 'petty bourgeois *vecinos* from the towns' (personal communication).

<sup>60</sup> She points out that part of the reason for this in the particular community included in her study, is its proximity to Chulumani and the consequent greater ease of contact with town-dwellers (Spedding 2004:89).

Rivera (1994:Chapter 1, p4-5) disagrees with the neat dichotomy between '*libre*' (free) communities and *ex-haciendas*, stating instead that a cultural homology can be found between all social sectors of the Yungas, and especially 'those down the bottom'. However, Carlos' comment alone seems to attest to a differentiation between the two types of communities, as experienced in some form or another by local people even to the present day. Clearly, the nature of the relations of material production that existed on the *haciendas* affected the type of cultural production that could take place. Those who lived and worked on the *haciendas*, while engaging in some small amount of autonomous activity in the coca trade, were nonetheless beholden to a large extent to the *hacendado* in terms of coca production and trade, and consequently were limited in the types of communications in which they could take part and in the types of cultural products they were able to produce.

### **Social and Cultural Changes after the 1953 Agrarian Reform**

After the Agrarian Reform of 1953, the mines were nationalised and the *haciendas* were divided up between former *colonos*, officially at 10 hectares each, although in practice it was more likely to correspond to between one and five (Knoerich 1969:9).<sup>61</sup> In the Yungas, the transition was less sudden and less violent than in other parts of the country (Bascopé Aspiazu 1982:27), with some Yungas *colonos* continuing to '*ayudar*' (help) the *patrón* until 1967 when protests and threats from the more radical sectors urged the remaining *patrones* to finally grant land titles, although they did not always specify where the corresponding land lay (Spedding and Llanos 1999:48; cf. Klein 1969:403-404).<sup>62</sup>

Some of the former *hacendados* are said to have moved to the provincial capital, in our case Chulumani, where they established small businesses (Heath 1973:81), and many supplemented their incomes by acting as intermediaries for the *campesinos* who now owned the land that once was theirs (*ibid.*:82). The *ex-colonos* now monopolised the production of coca, but did not have the personal contacts (social capital) or the economic capital to be able to make large-scale sales to wholesalers in La Paz, and so they sold their produce to intermediaries in Chulumani, many of whom were *ex-hacendados* (*ibid.*:87), or at local provincial or regional markets.<sup>63</sup> Some *ex-hacendados* managed to retain a small piece of their land, which they harvested themselves, or

---

<sup>61</sup>The left-leaning political party, MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario) came to power in a bloody revolution in April 1952, and by the next year had implemented far-reaching constitutional reform aimed to benefit the *campesino* majority. President Victor Paz Estenssoro's reform included universal suffrage, where indigenous people had previously had no vote (Heath 1973:78). Since that time, however, the MNR has moved ever further away from its original pro-indigenous ideals, to the point of being responsible for the shootings of indigenous protesters in El Alto in October 2003. See also Klein (1969) on the evolution of the MNR and Lagos (1994:48-68) on the effects of the Agrarian Reform in the Chapare.

<sup>62</sup> Bascopé Aspiazu (1982:27-28) writes that *colonos* in the Yungas were only partially informed about the new laws, and that after the Reform, a movement arose petitioning for the load of obligatory workdays on *haciendas* to be reduced from four to three days.

<sup>63</sup> According to Bascopé Aspiazu (1982:28), the Reform led to the abrupt dismantling of the commercialisation system that had functioned effectively during the previous decades. With trade networks undone, the result was an under-supply of coca arriving in the mines, where the greatest demand for traditional consumption lay.

contracted others to harvest, but the hegemony of the *patrones* was over and now the *campesinos* began to be more directly integrated into the national system and the market (CIPCA 1976:6). If they were not before, the *campesinos* were now well and truly active market players in a 'scheme of small, individualist production' (CIPCA 1976:28) and found they had renewed possibilities of upward mobility and social differentiation (CIPCA 1976:28; Knoerich 1969:10; Spedding 2004:81). It became important to be able to purchase material goods that would lead to an accumulation of symbolic capital on the part of the purchaser (CIPCA 1976:56), which may account in part for the increased popularity of the *jornal*, the paid workday, to the detriment, though certainly not the death, of reciprocal labour.

While it could be said that the Agrarian Reform merely completed a process already underway, whereby *campesino* production overtook servile production (Spedding 2004:59), these changes nonetheless had a profound influence on the communicative system of the Yungas and on the cultural production in which *campesinos* were able to engage. One of the main changes to occur was the formation of *sindicatos*, which replaced the *haciendas* as an administrative structure (cf. Keane 1994).<sup>64</sup> The first function of the *sindicato* was to file a petition with an agrarian judge for the reallocation of land, but they would also mediate some cases of inheritance, land exchange and so on (Heath 1973:83-84; cf. Lagos 1994:52). Heath (1973:82) writes that the *sindicatos* provide a sense of participatory community and a channel for communication with the outside world that was previously the role of the *hacendado* and more than this, the *sindicatos* were said to be responsible for a new awareness of what it meant to be a citizen. Now, he writes, via undertaking active leadership roles within the *sindicato*, people became more politically aware and learnt to communicate more effectively (ibid.:89). The *sindicato* system still serves this function today, as young people (still mostly men) are obliged to undertake their turn in the rotating leadership system, and in the process are socialised into being more politically literate and more effective communicators.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> *Sindicatos* were imposed by the newly empowered MNR on all *ex-hacienda* communities, as part of the Agrarian Reform. The *comunidades originarias* of the Yungas made the voluntary decision to adopt the *sindicato* system in around 1960. While it is argued that the State implemented the *sindicatos* as a way to ensure it was able to direct the way in which *campesinos* were incorporated into the national political system, the communities are said to have considered that the *sindicato* would provide them with a better avenue for expressing their demands to the central government than did their traditional institutions (Spedding 2004:276). In any case, nowadays Yungas *campesinos* stand staunchly by the *sindicato* system and have made no motions to advocate a return to recognition of traditional models of authority, as has occurred in other parts of the country (ibid.). When I first introduced myself officially to a member of ADEPCOCA (Departmental Association of Coca Producers), asking for his approval for my studies, he read the introductory letter that I had been given by my contact in the University in La Paz (UMSA), and upon reaching the part where a request was made for the support of the 'police, military and traditional authorities', he asked brusquely, 'What is meant by traditional? It should say syndical.' Today, *sindicatos* correspond to each community, and are responsible for the organisation of communal infrastructure and lands and for the defence of the coca leaf (cf. CIPCA 1976; Colque and Spedding n.d.; Conzelman 2007; Healy 1985; Spedding 2004). See Keane (1994:609) on the way similar administrative changes have affected communicative practices in Indonesia.

<sup>65</sup> Each year, often on the last day of the year, an *Ampliado* (General Meeting) is held in the *sindicato* headquarters and a new leadership panel is nominated and elected, usually by a show of hands. The General Secretary (*Secretario General*) is the leader of the community, and other roles include the treasurer (*Hacienda*), President of the Committee of School Parents (*Presidente de Junta de Padres de Familia*), School Mayor (*Alcalde Escolar*), President of the Committee of Works (*Presidente de Comité de Obras*), Secretary of Acts (*Secretario de Actas*) and representative of ADEPCOCA. There is usually an attempt to ensure that all male members of the *sindicato* have their turn in leadership, although people with a lot of experience who have proven themselves to be worthy of the job find themselves nominated for some position or other year after year.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the changes then, was not the economic implications for *campesinos*, but the cultural products that were produced through the process of change. As Mintz (1959:25) wrote, since internal market systems are a part of the national institutional structure, 'changes within them or imposed upon them may have repercussions reaching far beyond their immediate economic effects.' Heath (1973:75) heard people say during his fieldwork, 'Now we are becoming humans'. The MNR created the Ministry of *Campesino Affairs* (*Asuntos Campesinos*), in an active attempt to abolish the use of what had become the derogatory term of *indio* (Heath 1973:81), and people had the feeling that they had been 'liberated from slavery' (ibid.).<sup>66</sup> Knoerich (1969:15) expressed surprise in 1969 that *campesinos* rejected offers of paid work in preference for working their own fields, but acknowledged that working for another was seen to be a link to the despised *hacienda* days. In 2005, people would recount tales of having travelled to the city to find work, only to discover the horrors of being enslaved to a boss and a timetable. At his home in a small ex-*hacienda* community, Germán told me:

Why would I go and have a job where they tell me what time I have to arrive, what time I have to have lunch? I had that in the city. Here in the *campo*, no one bothers me. No one tells me what I have to do. If I don't want to work one day, if I want to bludge ('cainar'), no one says to us, 'Why aren't you working? Why are you bludging?' No, after the *faena* (work party), if we don't want to work, we don't have to work. I'm better here in the *campo*.

Born just after the Agrarian Reform, Germán has always enjoyed relative freedom, and yet he continues to live within a social structure that has its basis in *hacienda* times, for ex-*hacienda* elites continue to occupy the highest strata of Yungueño society (Rivera 1994:Chapter 3, p.2), resulting in a class system that is ethnically-based (See Chapter Three). Knoerich (1969:10) and Heath (1973:82) both mention that the ex-*hacendado* often remained, albeit unofficially, in his old role as *patrón* and broker after the Reform, and that *colonos* would continue their habit of going to see the *patrón* (often now living in the provincial capital), to consult on a certain matter or ask for help. While certainly an unusual case in having continued to live on the *hacienda* and remaining on good terms with the local population, the grandson of the ex-*patrón* in Germán's community plays an important role in brokering for the community. He was educated in the United States, has access to books and CD roms and has useful social connections in Chulumani and beyond. As such, he becomes a source of information and knowledge for local people, who consult him on many different matters. Germán's daughter told me how her father resented the fact that all community decisions were made on this man's authority, and that his power was due, in part, to the fact that he possessed the only motor vehicle in the community. 'He controls us,' she said. 'The people from

---

<sup>66</sup> Spedding (1994:155) suggests more sinister motives behind this act of removing any racial overtones from the terminology, placing it alongside other changes in national laws that could be interpreted as attempts to assimilate the indigenous population and encourage their hispanicisation. The effect has been, however, that the word '*campesino*', literally meaning 'peasant', or someone who works the land, is almost synonymous with the word, 'indigenous'. See Komadina (2001:97) who writes that 'the State of 1952 was a project destined to institute a cultural community – the Bolivian nation – through a process of cultural homogenisation that was imagined as a synthesis between the indigenous cultures and the occidental culture.' See also Grey Postero (2001:4), Lagos (1994:136-7) and Rivera (2005:18).

the community allow themselves to be controlled by him.' Her father, when I broached the subject, replied a little defensively, 'We are all equals.'

### **Ethnicity, Class and Division of Labour: The Triadic Legacy of the Spanish Conquest and the *Campo-Pueblo* Dichotomy**

J. A. Barnes (1954:45) outlined several ways in which the concept of class has been treated in contemporary times, beginning with Marx's material determinism and ending with class as a 'category of thought, a unit of division used when members of a society mentally divide up the population into status categories' (Barnes 1954:45).<sup>67</sup> It is this last definition that I find most apt for the discussion of class in the Yungas, for here, while class is related to the means of production and to division of labour as per Marx (Marx and Engels 1967), it is not directly related to economic categories, although it may be perceived to be. It *is*, however, directly related to ethnic categories, which can also be considered 'categories of thought' (cf. Grey Postero 2001; Lagos 1994:151; Ruíz et al. 1996; Viola Recasens 1996:166; Wolf 2001:18-259).<sup>68</sup> As people move from one labour category to another, they move through different (thought) classes, and also through different ethnic (thought) categories. These three designations are inextricably intertwined as a legacy of the social system that prevailed during colonial times.

As discussed, the division of labour under the *hacienda* system was divided along ethnic lines, with what Soux de Wayar (n.d.:2-3) refers to interchangeably as the 'indigenous class' and the 'popular classes' comprising producers and consumers of coca, the 'middle classes' (*mestizos*) being merchants or owners of small properties, and the 'oligarchy' (Spanish or foreigners) being the owners of *haciendas* and exportation houses. After the Agrarian Reform of 1953 undid the system under which they had thrived, some of the *hacendados* moved to Chulumani to establish small businesses or to act as intermediaries in the coca trade (Heath 1973:81-82). Today, it is their children and grandchildren (*mestizos* and *blancos*) who form the elite of Yungas society, often continuing to own large extensions of land, engaging in business activities such as transport, cattle raising and hospitality, and occupying, at least up until the social upheavals of the last few years, most of the government and services employment opportunities (Rivera 1994:Chapter 3, p.2; Spedding 1994:144). 'Forty years after the Agrarian Reform,' writes Rivera (1994:Chapter 3, p.2), 'the mark of *misti* (*blanco*)<sup>69</sup> *patrón* culture is still perceptible in these towns,' with the 'children and

---

<sup>67</sup> Marx referred to individuals as 'personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests' (Marx 1952:7). His notion of class held that individuals' class affiliation was determined at birth in accordance with their relationship to the means of production. Classes then became definite groups which were 'mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive and endured through at least several decades' (Barnes 1954:45).

<sup>68</sup> See the proceedings of the seminar *Mestizaje: Ilusiones y Realidades* (Ruíz et al. 1996), part of a series run by the National Museum of Ethnography and Folklore, La Paz, which deals with the issue of *mestizaje* ('*mestizo*-ness') and ethnic categorisations and identities. See also Wolf's (2001:252-59) essay entitled 'Is the Peasantry a Class?' where he argues that there is too much variation between different peasant groups to place them into one 'class category'.

<sup>69</sup> *Misti* probably comes from the Spanish word *mestizo* and is used in Aymara as a derogatory term for the middle-classes or urban dwellers (cf. Spedding 1996:31). The translation offered in Bacarreza's Aymara dictionary is 'Man of white race' (Bacarreza 2000).



grandchildren of the *hacendados* and *mayordomos* of yesteryear... occupying... once again, the peak of the social and cultural hierarchy of the region.<sup>70</sup>

Likewise, Spedding (1994:142) writes that 'The relations between landowner, *hacendado* or *patrón*, and the *colono* or *peón* has structured the relation between 'indio' and 'blanco' in the Yungas for many generations.' The link between ethnicity and division of labour remains intact to the point that the word *campesino* (from *campo*, literally, someone who works the land) is synonymous with *indigena* (indigenous).<sup>71</sup> Rodolfo, an indigenous man from La Paz who had worked as an English teacher in Yungas communities for several years told me:

I am a *campesino*. I am from the city, but I am a *campesino*, and now I am happy to be with my people. This is where I should be.

Likewise, when I asked a man from a community whether he was Aymara, *mestizo*, *blanco* and so on, he said to me, 'How can I say it...? *Campesino*.' As such, *campesino*, in principal a labour category, is designated as an ethnicity, along with *mestizo* and *blanco*. Any who live and work in the *campo* are considered to share an ethnic identity (*campesino*), despite differences in language (Aymara, Quechua, *Castellano*<sup>72</sup>), and socioeconomics, and conversely, anyone who does not live in the *campo*, but identifies as indigenous, could conceivably consider themselves to be a *campesino*, as does Rodolfo. However, most town or city dwellers have likely worked hard to escape that designation and would not see the merit in such a lowering of rank (cf. Spedding 1996:31), for just as indigenous equals *campesino*, and correspondingly ethnicity equals division of labour, ethnicity and division of labour also equal class. So, when my partner's *campesino* family learnt of his relationship with me, his uncle said to him:

You've risen up to another level now. You've gone from *mestizo* to *blanco*. You won't recognise your family anymore.<sup>73</sup>

This comment highlights two things. Firstly, that *blanco* is a higher category than *mestizo*, as one must 'rise up' to achieve it. And secondly, that it is possible to shift from one ethnic category to another as you shift your circles of association and, most probably, your labour activities, as well as the dress, manners, mannerisms, language and accent that correspond to certain labour, class or

---

<sup>70</sup> Rivera (1994:Chapter 3, p.2) goes on to state, however, that these members of the ex-oligarchy are increasingly having to share the power base with the 'new rich,' who are from more humble or migrant origins. This has increasingly become true in the last few years as exemplified by the election of ADEPCOCA, the Yungas coca growers' association, into local government in 2004.

<sup>71</sup> This could partly be attributed to the MNR's active attempts to replace the derogatory word *indio* with *campesino* after the Reforms of 1953 (cf. Heath 1973:81; Rivera 2005:18; Spedding 1994:155).

<sup>72</sup> *Castellano* is the form of Spanish spoken in Latin America.

<sup>73</sup> When we went to visit his family for the first time, we were spotted by a neighbour from across the fields, and his father rapidly received the message that a couple of *gringos* were coming to see him. Later, an old family friend refused to believe that this was the young man she had known as a child, for 'How could Don 'C' have a *gringo* for a son?' When we were together, he would sometimes be asked if he was German, despite having the dark features of a *mestizo*. When confronted with my upper class friends and family in La Paz, however, he was a poor *campesino*. This is a handy illustration of the way in which one can become white by association.

ethnic groups, the three being inseparable.<sup>74</sup> In this way, Spedding (1994:133) writes that a *campesino*'s son who secures work in an office after learning the manners appropriate to the office-working class, will join the hispanic rank (cf. Harris 1995:114; Spedding 1996:29), and my four-year-old Chulumani god-daughter demonstrates the deep-seatedness of these categorisations when she says that she will become a *gringa*<sup>75</sup>, like me, when she grows up. Peruvian-born writer Mario Vargas Llosa writes indignantly in a La Paz newspaper, that:

Anyone who is not blind and stupid notices, straight away, that in Latin America, more than racial, the notions of 'Indian' and 'white' (or 'black' or 'yellow') are cultural, and that they are impregnated with economic and social content. A Latin American becomes white at the rate at which he or she gets richer and acquires power, while a poor person becomes *cholo*<sup>76</sup> or Indianized at the rate at which he or she descends the social pyramid.

(2006)

Hence the common saying in Bolivia, 'el dinero blanquea' ('The money whitens') (cf. Rivera 1994:Chapter 1, p.5). In this context, Vargas Llosa (2006) accuses newly elected President Evo Morales of not being an Indian, strictly speaking, despite having been born into a poor, indigenous family and having herded llamas as a child.<sup>77</sup> Having learnt the language and the ways of the 'aristocracy', he has ceased to be indigenous and become 'creole':<sup>78</sup>

It is enough to hear his good Spanish with rounded 'r's..., his astute modesty..., his studied and wise ambiguities, to know that Don Evo is the emblematic Latin American creole, cunning as a fox... and with wide experience as a manipulator of men and women, acquired in his long trajectory as *cocalero* leader and member of the sindical aristocracy in his country.

(Vargas Llosa 2006)

What all of this amounts to in the Yungas is a dichotomy between *campo* and *pueblo* that is drawn along class and ethnic lines that are tied to labour, where townsfolk are non-agriculturalists and incorporate the top two tiers of the social system; *mestizo* and middle-class (*clase media*) or *blanco*

---

<sup>74</sup>Dress is especially important; *de pollera* is the term for people who wear the traditional (indigenous) dress, while *de vestido* are those who have abandoned or never wore it.

<sup>75</sup>*Gringa* is the feminine form of *gringo*, which was initially used in Latin America to refer to people from the United States. It is often used as a derogatory term. In Bolivia, the term is used to refer to any foreigner of white skin.

<sup>76</sup>The word *cholo* is rarely used in everyday speak, but could be said to describe a person of indigenous descent who has rejected the law that designates him as *campesino* by moving to the city. It is only ever used in a derogatory context. The feminine form, *chola* is used more often, also in a derogatory way, while the diminutive *cholita* is not derogatory and corresponds to any woman in indigenous dress. See Spedding (1996:30) for a discussion of the various terms used to categorise people.

<sup>77</sup>Evo Morales is an Aymara who migrated with his family from the *altiplano* to the Chapare, to make a living from the coca leaf. He came to fame as the President of the Chapare Coca Growers' Federation and was elected as President of the Republic of Bolivia in January 2006 as Bolivia's first indigenous President.

<sup>78</sup>The Spanish word used by Vargas Llosa is '*criollo*' (creole), which in this case refers to the descendants of European settlers in Latin America.



and upper class (*clase alta*), while those who live in the *campo* are *campesino* (indigenous) and lower class (*clase baja*) (cf. Lagos 1994:151). These designations are no less real for the fact that they do not necessarily translate to the economic categories that they are purported to, as will be discussed further in Chapter Seven in the context of perceptions of poverty (cf. Spedding 1994:132).

If we are to apply this to our analysis of the coca and cultural production systems as a *field* in Bourdieu's sense (1984; 1986; 1990), we might say that the *campesinos* share a habitus, a 'subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception' (Bourdieu 1977:86), within which there are deviations which may have to do with the amount of capital possessed by each individual, and that the town-dwelling *mestizos* and *blancos* (who are often designated as belonging to the same group in distinction from the *campesinos*), also share a habitus within which there are deviations according to the amount of capital possessed, which may differ more significantly between those designated as *mestizos* and those as *blancos*, than between those of the same designation.<sup>79</sup> In other words, agriculturalists share a habitus, and non-agriculturalists share a habitus (see Figure 8).

The habitus was engendered by the historical conditions discussed throughout this chapter, and manifests itself through such practice as language, accent, associations, dress, manners and habits, of which coca chewing is a prime example, reserved only for *campesinos* (cf. Bourdieu 1977:86-7; 1984:172; Lagos 1994:137).<sup>80</sup> However, since practice can be accounted for by relating the 'objective structure' which gave rise to the habitus, to the conditions in which the habitus is currently operating (Bourdieu 1977:78), the habitus allows for practice to be adapted according to the 'objective potentialities' available in the immediate present (Bourdieu 1977:76). This means that people are able to alter their dress, their accent, their associations, as they see opportunities for social ascension, and as they accumulate capital of the different types. Hence, as one rises up the social ladder, one becomes more *mestizo* or more *blanco* in one's mannerisms and taste (cf. Rivera 1994:Chapter 1, p.5; Spedding 1994:133; Vargas Llosa 2006).

---

<sup>79</sup> Bourdieu (1977:86) writes that 'each individual system of dispositions may be seen as a *structural variant* of all the other group or class habitus,' expressing the difference between positions within or without the class, but that 'the history of the individual is never anything other than a certain specification of the collective history of his group or class (ibid.). In other words, he describes diversity within homogeneity (ibid.).

<sup>80</sup> Lagos (1994:137) describes the contested manifestations of *campesinidad* (of being peasant) in highland Cochabamba, Bolivia, which encompass dress, land ownership and labour practices. Some of these notions of *campesinidad* are appealed to openly in order to legitimate one's right to define one's self as peasant, or to delegitimize another's such self-determination. Others remain unspoken.

# The Coca Field

[[**habitus**](**capital**)] + **field** = **practice**

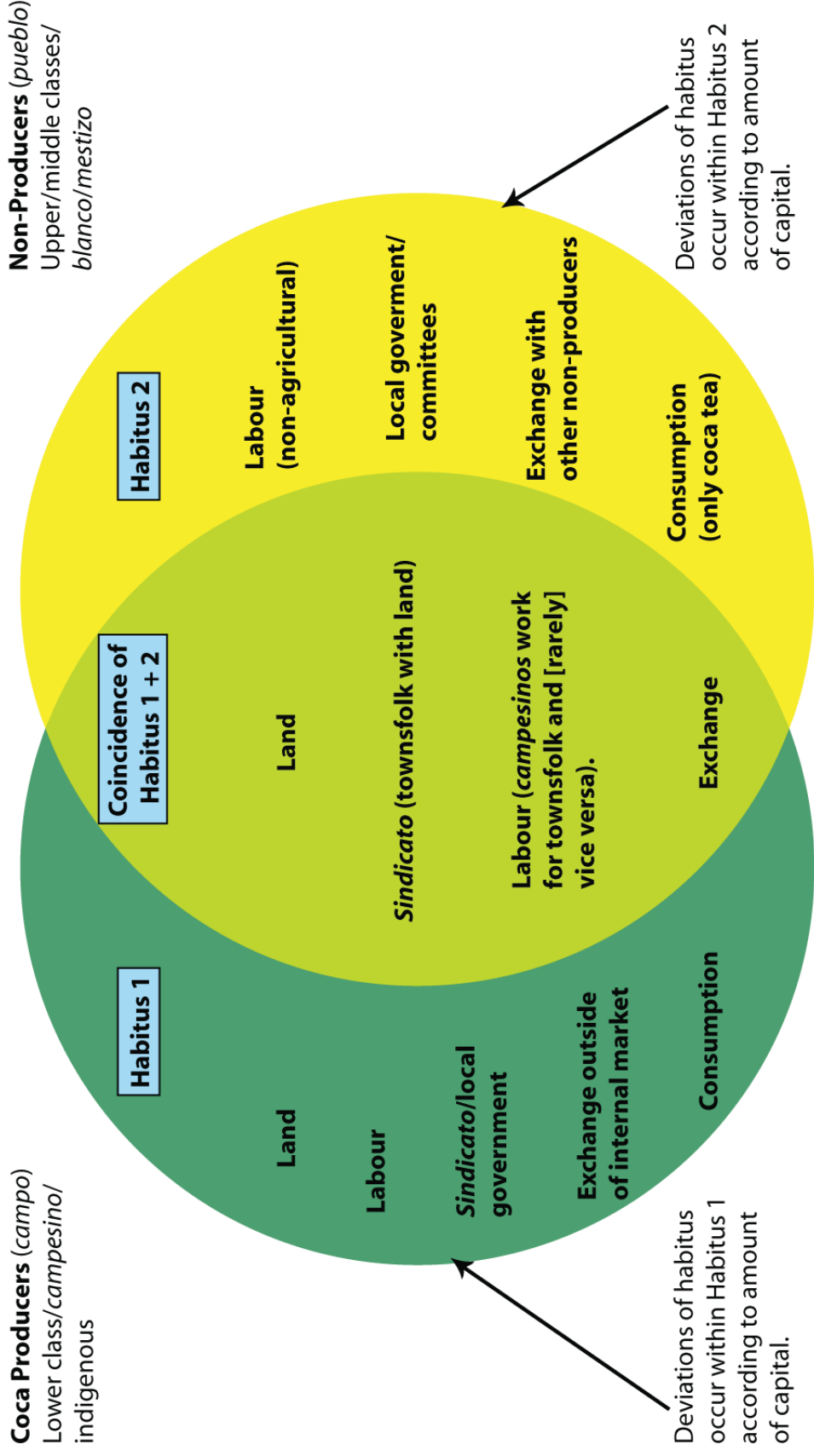


FIGURE 8: Diagram of the coca field, showing habitus of coca producers and non-producers (campo/pueblo).

Yet, in our case study of the Yungas, there are nodes of coincidence between the two habitus described, where a shared history of oppression is called to the fore.<sup>81</sup> This manifests itself through a shared apperception of the ‘thought categories’ outlined above, whereby all members of the Yungas understand, internalise and play by those rules of categorisation whose seeds were sown in a time perhaps forgotten, but believed to be remembered (cf. Harris 1995:109). Yungueños, *campo* and *pueblo*, are interconnected as parts of the same ecosystem of coca communications, of the same *field*, and it is coca - the production, consumption and exchange of it – that facilitates this interconnection and that is that node of coincidence between the habitus of the different groups, as demonstrated in the diagram below. ‘Coca brings in everything,’ Ramón says to me inside his shop in town. ‘Without coca, there is nothing. The people sell coca, they buy clothes from us and with that we go and buy goods in La Paz.’ Coca lays the economic, but also the social, communicational and historical foundations of the society. It is when coca, and with it the system that it upholds, is threatened by an external enemy, that *campo* and *pueblo* coincide, and all become yungueños (cf. Rivera 1994: Chapter1, p.5).

### **The Coca Leaf as Protagonist in the Creation of Discourse after the Spanish Conquest**

The women of Chulumani’s Evangelical Church peeled potatoes as the men discussed Church business inside. One of the women, wearing the traditional *pollera* (skirt), had a sore foot. When Doña Prudencia advised her to place chewed coca on the ailing appendage, the woman replied, ‘No, I don’t use coca.’ ‘You don’t drink coca *mate*<sup>82</sup> when you have a sore stomach?’ Doña Prudencia asked, eyebrows raised. ‘No.’ ‘Why?’ ‘I don’t have a sore stomach. And it’s not good to chew coca.’ Doña Prudencia scowled and took up arms in an age-old fight that has seen many guises throughout what is at least a five hundred year history. ‘What do you mean it’s not good?! If God gave us coca, it’s for chewing! Where does it say in the Bible that you can’t chew coca?’ ‘Well, I haven’t found where,’ the woman looked doubtful, ‘but... it’s a sin.’ ‘If it says in the Bible that it’s a sin, then it’s a sin. If it doesn’t say so, then it’s not, and where does it say so?’

This conversation may well have been heard during the early years of the Spanish conquest, as the Catholic Church at that time found reason to oppose the use of coca among the indigenous people. In 1569, an audience of South American bishops denounced coca as ‘a pernicious leaf’ and a ‘delusion of the devil’ (Mortimer 1901:108), the argument being that because the coca leaf was so deeply embedded in the Andean cosmology and worldview, coca was impeding the Christianisation of the ‘pagans’ (Sanabria 1993:39). Coca was and continues to be an important

---

<sup>81</sup> Bourdieu (1977:78-9) describes the habitus as ‘history turned into nature. i.e. denied as such... The “unconscious” is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of habitus...’ He goes on to quote Durkheim (1938:16) ‘...in each of us, in varying proportions, there is part of yesterday’s man; it is yesterday’s man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result. Yet we do not sense this man of the past, because he is inveterate in us; he makes up the unconscious part of ourselves... Conversely, we are very much aware of the most recent attainments of civilization, because, being recent, they have not yet had time to settle in our unconscious’ (Bourdieu 1977:79).

<sup>82</sup> Tea made by brewing coca leaves.

part of the *campesinos*' lives, being used in everyday social interaction, in ritual and religious situations, for divinations, and for medicinal purposes, as well as for warding off hunger and tiredness during long work hours. Sidney Mintz goes out on a limb when he claims that 'Tobacco, sugar and tea were the first objects within capitalism that conveyed with their use the complex idea that one could *become* different by consuming differently' (Mintz 1985:185). To use coca in the traditional ways is, and has been since the Spanish conquest, to *be* indigenous, and the discourses that have been created over the years have been discourses also about the indigenous consumers of the leaf.<sup>83</sup> Explorer Amerigo Vespucci wrote of the indigenous people of the north coast of South America on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 1504:

We found therein the most brutish and loathsome people that were ever seen... In behaviour and looks, they were very repulsive and they all had their cheeks swollen out with a green herb inside, which they were constantly chewing like beasts, so that they could hardly utter speech.

(1926:17-18; 1894:25-26)

At around the same time, Spanish conquistador Pedro Cieza de Leon wrote, after asking some 'Indians' why they engaged in the chewing of coca:

The reason some Indians, to whom I put the question, gave me for so doing, was that it made them insensible of hunger, and added to their strength and vigour. Something there may be in it, yet I am rather of opinion it is only an ill habit, and fit for such people as they are.

(Cieza de Leon in Martindale 1886:2)

Sixteenth-century coca chewers found themselves in the centre of a heated debate over the potential merits or ills of chewing coca and it could be argued, as does Mintz (1985:152-153) with regard to sugar, that those who hold a commanding position over the availability of a commodity, also hold a certain amount of control over at least some of the meanings that that commodity acquires. He writes, 'the simultaneous control of both the foods themselves and the meanings they are made to connote can be a means of pacific domination' (Mintz 1985:153). Coca abolitionists, headed by the Church, eventually lost out against the owners of the mines, who had discovered that their workers could work much longer hours and on less food if allowed to chew coca, with one mine owner writing to the Viceroy of Peru that if deprived of the leaf, 'the Indians will return to their pagan ways' (Juan Matienzo cited in Sanabria 1993:40; cf. Mortimer 1901:157). Since that time,

---

<sup>83</sup> Non-indigenous middle-class Bolivians can be guaranteed to have a box of industrialised coca tea bags in their kitchen cupboard to be used for a number of health reasons, but they would never deign to chew the leaves.

however, there has been much controversy over the health effects of coca chewing, and those who engage in this practice are implicated in any value judgements bestowed upon it.<sup>84</sup>

The sorts of discourses that grew up around coca and coca consumers were enacted in everyday life on the *haciendas* (Foucault 1972), with the *hacendados* adhering to a social Darwinist logic in which they regarded their dominant position over the indigenous people as 'right' and 'natural' due to the supposed inferiority of the latter. It is here that the habitus works as 'structured' and 'structuring structures' (Bourdieu 1990:53), enabling 'thought categories' to become real. It is here too that unequal power relations are hegemonically produced and reproduced through consent (Crehan 2002:104). The *colonos* were required to address the *hacendado* as '*tata*' (Sir or father), while an indigenous man of any age would be addressed by the term '*yocalla*', the Aymara word for 'boy' (Heath 1973:80). This could occur, Gramsci would argue, because of the position and function that the *hacendados* enjoyed in the world of production' (Gramsci 1971:12). Today, the words 'I'm not your yocalla!' might be heard from a man who feels he is not being treated with respect. An elderly man, Don Prudencio, remembers how the discourse of racism was an institutional part of society:

Before, to be able to go to the school, they looked at your surname. They didn't let the Mamani, the Quispe and so on into the school. There was discrimination.... They didn't open the doors to them.

This practice is reflected in present times, as young men change their names from Quispe to Quisbert in order to be able to enter the military as officer cadets.<sup>85</sup> A local judge told me as we sat in the plaza in Chulumani one day, that Bolivia would be much more developed if the *campesinos* were European instead of Aymara. 'They would progress; they're different people,' he said, and explained to me that the reason why farmers in Australia used machinery, whilst farmers here still used picks 'has nothing to do with the economy' (nor presumably with the topography). 'It's genetic.' (See Wolf 2001:185).<sup>86</sup> Similarly, when I rode on the bus next to a large-scale property owner who would be classified as *blanco*, he prefaced his discussion with 'I am not racist', and then continued:

These people have been born with some deficit; they were born missing something. These people don't learn. Things go in one ear and out the other. The Incas tried to conquer the Aymaras, but they couldn't. These people didn't want to understand. How can we make them understand?

---

<sup>84</sup> Carter (1996) has compiled a collection of essays discussing the physical and psychological effects of coca chewing on users. See also the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano's 1986 collection, for example Cáceres (1986). See also Hanna and Hornick (1977), Laserna (n.d.), Lema (1997), Martindale (1886:49-5), Mortimer (1901) and Scott (1979) on this topic.

<sup>85</sup> Upon the death of one woman in Chulumani, her children discovered that they had legally disinherited themselves by changing their surnames to a hispanicised version of the name. As I was told by the social commentators of the town, they had changed their names because they were 'names of *campesinos*'. Only one daughter had retained her mother's name and was to be vindicated for her discretion.

<sup>86</sup> Wolf (2001:185) writes that the fusing of biology and socially acquired heritage in order to mark off one group from another, serves the function of 'naturalising' distinctions, and as such legitimating the claims of one group to exclusiveness, priority and monopoly.

By exchanging and creating values, through actions as well as through the permanence of writing, the Spanish, the dominant group in society and owners of the mode of production, set in motion the creation of a discourse about indigenous people, the chewers of coca, that not only continues to be reproduced today, but that also had real effects upon the local people and upon the kinds of cultural products that they themselves produced (cf. Foucault 1972; Said 1978). People ceased to practise certain traditional activities, and were made to feel ashamed for speaking their indigenous languages. 'At school, they caned you if you spoke Aymara,' Germán said, while Carmela told me one day outside her stall in Chulumani, 'We're losing the Aymara language. People are ashamed to speak it.' As Albó (1994:129) writes, 'the dominant racist rhetoric is so persistent that it becomes digested also by many Indians, who begin to feel themselves as "brutes" and "uncivilised"' (cf. Escobar 1984; 1995).

However, entrenched feelings of shame at being indigenous now intermingle with renewed feelings of anger and a new-found sense of pride that can only have come about because indigenous people did, somehow, have the capacity to continue to produce cultural products of their own, by continuing to speak their own language and to participate in social acts of communication such as the sharing of coca. There is a space of contestation within that 'dynamic of control and lack of control between discourses and their subjects' (Weedon 1987:113), so that a counter-discourse can be enacted (Foucault 1972; cf. Dirks et al. 1994; Harris 1995; Stephenson 2000), or a counter-hegemony constructed (Gramsci 1971; Scott 1985). It is important to note that, unlike Mintz's (1985:173-174) sugar, which acquired its meanings through a downward spread from the dominant classes to the masses of Europe, coca already had entrenched meanings among its consumers that would remain intact at the same time that other groups would go on to create new meanings for it. These are reproduced and reworked through consumption, as well as through words, poetry and song (cf. Arnold et al. 1992; Komadina 2001:95; Harris 1995).<sup>87</sup>

The work of breaking down a long-standing cultural hegemony and of restructuring a social system is on-going. It seems more defensive than triumphant when school directors shout at distracted Yungas school children each year on the dubiously-named 'Day of the Indian', about how their grandparents had fought for independence and liberty so that today, they could own and work their own land.<sup>88</sup> But when one man took the microphone on this day, 51 years after the Reform, and said he hoped that from now on the day would be renamed, 'Day of the producer who lives in the *campo*', he was claiming what he considered his right to rename himself and reclaim control over the production of his own identity.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Arnold et al. (1992) have reproduced songs relating to coca. See Harris (1995) for a discussion of cultural transformation, and the role of narratives about the past in the construction of identity.

<sup>88</sup> This annual celebration commemorates the day that the Agrarian Reform project was approved and converted to law under the Constitution of the Republic of Bolivia, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1953 (Bascopé Aspiazu 1982:27; Lagos 1994:51).

<sup>89</sup> In his words, 'Día del productor que vive en el *campo*.'



## The Struggle for Control of Coca and Discourse takes a Global Turn

### The International Community Joins the Struggle over Control of the Coca Leaf and Cocaine

If the press were not bad enough already, in 1860, a German chemist by the name of Albert Nieman was to irreparably tarnish the reputation of the coca leaf by isolating one of its alkaloids, 'kokain' (Mortimer, 1886:52; Gootenberg 2001:3). Cocaine's first use was as an anaesthetic highly advocated by the psychologist Sigmund Freud, who decried its virtues against depression and indigestion, among other ailments (Bascopé Aspiazu 1982:37; Gootenberg 2001:3; Mortimer 1901:413, 428). In 1886, Golden Mortimer wrote:

The medical interest which has centred in Cocaine as a local anaesthetic during the last eighteen months, has gradually become diffused as 'public opinion,' the more so, of late, as it has been recommended as a remedy for sea-sickness, from which Britons all more or less suffer on leaving our sea-girt home; otherwise, internally, Cocaine has been but little used compared with its future probably extended use when its effects are better known.

(1886:1)

The coca leaf itself did not delay in finding its way into popular consumption patterns in Europe and the United States. As early as 1863, a highly successfully-marketed concoction of Bordeaux wine and coca, known as *Vin Mariani*, had taken Europe by storm (Gootenberg 2001:3), and in 1886, John Styth Pemberton first experimented by mixing coca, carbonated water, caffeine and cola nut extracts to create what would become the world's most popular soft-drink, Coca-Cola (May 1988b).<sup>90</sup> Yungas coca growers were now well and truly a part of the international economy and set to ride out the rough tide of opinion and politics that would characterise this leaf's global journey.

By the 1920s, the League of Nations (the precursor to the United Nations) were making murmurings of doubt about the health benefits of both cocaine and coca, which influential scientific studies neglected to differentiate as two different substances (Lema 1997:109). The impact of further studies in the 1940s, which Lema (1997:110) refers to as 'scientifically questionable', was to help 'spread the opinion that coca had a negative effect on the "character" of its consumers and predisposed them to a range of diseases.' This came at a time when modernisation development theory, the thesis that all societies or cultures moved along a common trajectory toward ultimate development, constituted the dominant development discourse, and indigenous consumers of the

---

<sup>90</sup> Today's Coca-Cola company remains silent, when challenged, on whether it continues to use de-cocainised coca leaf in the production of the drink, but it is known that tonnes of coca leaf have been exported from Bolivia to the United States for this purpose in previous years, despite the latter's professed declaration of war on the commodity. See May (1988b) and *The Weekend Australian*, March 17-18 2007.

coca leaf were considered to be lagging behind others on this unilinear journey (Lema 1997:110; cf. Huntington 1968; Rostow 1971). Hobart (1993:2), particularly concerned with the way in which knowledge and ignorance are constituted in development practices, has written, 'In order for them to be able to progress, these peoples have first to be constituted as "underdeveloped" and ignorant' (cf. Escobar 1984; 1995; Esteva 1992; Hobart 1993). Coca was implicated as a cause of 'underdevelopment', as Lema writes:

Coca chewing, this 'necessary evil', supposedly a remnant of traditional culture, was already in the process of being construed as an obstacle to development, modernization, civilization and progress.

(Lema 1997:110)<sup>91</sup>

When the United Nations recommended that the Bolivian government limit the practice of coca chewing in the country (Lema 1997:112), the large-scale Yungas landholders of the SPY (Proprietors' Society of the Yungas)<sup>92</sup> bought into the debate, probably concerned less about the image of the coca consumers and more about the financial implications for themselves. They chose to emphasise, alongside the economic arguments, the fact that coca was a traditional and deeply embedded practice among Bolivian people (Lema 1997:113-114) and called for the commercialisation of legal products derived from coca in much the same way pro-coca interest groups do today (Lema 1997:100). They published pamphlets in a concerted communications effort aimed at influencing international opinion about the coca leaf, and stressed the importance of coca marketing in facilitating communications and transport in the Yungas.

The Bolivian government were initially sympathetic to the SPY's demands, likely due in large part to the fact that the coca duties they generated accounted for 80% of all taxes from national products in the early 1950s, but after the Agrarian Reform, the economic clout upon which they had based their powerful lobbying activities was dissolved (Lema 1997:112). In 1961, the U.N. Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (United Nations 1961) heralded the first attempts to control coca production in Bolivia as part of an international war against drug trafficking (Lema 1997:112).

### **The United States Declares War on the Coca Leaf and the Producers accept the Challenge**

By the 1980s, cocaine use in the so-called developed world had proliferated. At a time when Bolivia was experiencing its worst economic crisis (Sanabria, 1993:41), with inflation reaching as high as 11750% in 1984 (Healy 1986:107; cf. Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1998:13; Streatfield,

---

<sup>91</sup> See also Hobart (1993:20-21), who discusses how a correlation has been drawn between ignorance, the growth of which corresponds to a growth in knowledge useful for development, and evil.

<sup>92</sup> SPY (*Sociedad Propietaria de los Yungas*) was an organisation of large-scale Yungas property owners formed in 1830. The SPY were powerful enough to be able to charge their own taxes, which they put toward the construction and maintenance of roads (Soux de Wayar n.d.:3) See also Lema (1997).

2001:374.), well-positioned elites and impoverished producers alike were not loath to welcome any income that this industry would offer. In 1986, having officially identified the drug trade as a threat to national security, Ronald Reagan declared a 'War on Drugs' that has primarily been fought in the fields and homes of South America's farming families, despite Reagan's initial plans to focus on stemming domestic consumption (Collett 1989:23-24; cf. Riley 1996).

This war has been experienced by Yungas people as an occupation of their territory by foreign agents, in particular the Bolivian antidrug police (UMOPAR)<sup>93</sup>, trained by United States Special Forces counter-drug deployments (CIP 1999). However, it has not been one-sided. In 1982, *campesinos* arrived in Chulumani in their hundreds or thousands, depending on the story-teller, and killed the UMOPAR agents stationed in the town at the time.<sup>94</sup> They had chosen no longer to accept the abuses, thefts and acts of rape that these agents were said to be committing in the countryside. Germán told me the agents had been drinking in the theatre that night: 'drinking their farewell'.

People had had enough. It was no longer like the time of the slaves. Now this is a new generation. Things have to be different. They shot them down easily. Even their dog didn't survive. People arrived for market the next morning to find the street full of corpses.<sup>95</sup>

After that incident, the UMOPAR agents retired from the Yungas and did not set up their new base across the valley in Irupana until five years later (Spedding 1994:198). A military operation was launched in the Yungas in 2001, with the aim of eradicating coca in excess of the 12000 hectares permitted by law, but the young soldiers were met with violence and hostility, eventually being forced to march, hungry and tired, back along the road toward La Paz.<sup>96</sup> When representatives from the government came to Chulumani to negotiate with the producers, the massive protests, with *campesinos* numbering in the thousands, forced them to back down and agree not to eradicate.<sup>97</sup> 'They marched them out in their *caimanes* (tanks)', said Carolina. 'Since that time, they haven't come back. They're scared.' Such collective action, echoed again and again in mass protests and road blockades, demonstrates that the control over coca production will not be relinquished without a fight.

There are however, subtler and less violent ways in which this fight is fought, calling to mind Scott's (1985:29) 'everyday forms of peasant resistance'. In 1988, the United Nations convened in Vienna to adopt a convention against illicit drug trafficking (United Nations 1988), one of the outcomes of which was Bolivia's Law 1008, commonly referred to as the 'coca law'. Some facets of Bolivian law

---

<sup>93</sup> Unidad Móvil de Patrullaje Rural (Mobile Rural Patrol Unit), otherwise known as the *leopardos* (leopards).

<sup>94</sup> There are many different versions of this event, some examples of which can be found in Spedding (1994:195-198).

<sup>95</sup> A woman from the town remembers being a child at the time: 'At around two in the morning all the *campesinos* had arrived, with guns. We in the town didn't know anything about it. We heard gunshots. The whole town was full; thousands of people had come. They killed them all... The next day, that whole street was covered in blood. All black. Like in the movies.'

<sup>96</sup> Such operations continue on a daily basis in the Chapare, part of the declared excess coca zone. See Spedding (2003).

<sup>97</sup> Images of these events were captured and can be seen in Silvia Rivera's (2001) documentary, *Las Fronteras de la Coca*.

as it relates to coca have been changed since Evo Morales' ascension to power, so I will refer to the state of affairs as it was during my fieldwork. I am unable to comment on the effects of recent changes. The Law 1008 clearly outlines a situation in which the Bolivian State controlled the production, circulation and commercialisation of coca, perhaps in a way more pervasive even than during colonial times and certainly more so than during the time of the Incas. According to the Law, the State had the right to know the origin and destination of all coca produced, defined the routes and means of transport by which coca was to be transported to legal markets, and sanctioned those who traded coca without a permit. The State defined the legal markets in which coca could be sold, and was responsible for determining the amount of coca needed to cover the demands of traditional consumption.<sup>98</sup> Exportation of the leaf can only occur with the authorisation of the Ministry of Social Prevision and Public Health (Congreso Nacional 1988 Art. 38).<sup>99</sup> While it cannot be denied that these restrictions did affect coca growers in terms of the commercialisation choices they were able to make, on closer inspection of how some of the document's articles were enacted on the ground, the level of control that the State had in real terms is thrown into question.

For instance, while it was (and is) legal according to Bolivian law to cultivate coca in the Chulumani area, according to the Law 1008, it was technically not legal for any new coca fields to be planted or existing fields extended, nor was it legal for individuals to cultivate seedlings.<sup>100</sup> If coca fields, having reached the end of their lifespan, were to be replanted, this could only be done with the authorisation and supervision of the Executive Power, and would be done with plants supplied by the State (Article 31, Congreso Nacional 1988:10). Yet, in reality, coca producers planted new coca fields every day, and cultivated seeds with which to do so.<sup>101</sup> Likewise, Article 17 states that all coca fields must be entered into a property register to be kept by the Ministry of *Campesino* and Agricultural Affairs (Congreso Nacional 1988:7). With new fields being planted every day, this was another wild fantasy, and even if it were attempted, government officials would certainly get no help from locals in trying to measure and map their coca fields.

---

<sup>98</sup> This falls under the responsibility of the Subsecretary of Alternative Development and Substitution of Coca Crops and the legal amount has since 1988 been decreed to be 12000 hectares of coca. Evo Morales has recently abolished the stipulation that coca must be sold at a limited number of specially designated coca markets, meaning that coca producers are now able to sell directly to consumers. See Conzelman (2007:289-90) and La Razón (2006b; 2006c).

<sup>99</sup> Argentinean Federal Law 23737 has decriminalised possession and consumption of the coca leaf throughout the country since 1989, although it remains illegal for the leaf to cross the border from Bolivia. Border guards are said to accept bribes to allow the leaf to pass, while occasionally incinerating coca leaves with large press coverage in order to be seen to be enforcing the law. At other times they confiscate the leaf and then resell it further south (Rivera 2005:35). Since being elected, Evo Morales has been attempting to have the ban lifted on exportation to Argentina (La Razón 2006b).

<sup>100</sup> Law 1008 divided Bolivia into three types of zone: traditional production zones, which were defined as areas where coca had been grown 'historically, socially and agroecologically' for traditional uses, and which included the Chulumani area; excedentary, transitional production zones, which were those areas that had been colonised for the purpose of coca production and in which coca production was to be phased out; and illicit production zones, which included all other areas of the Republic and where coca was prohibited and if cultivated would be subject to obligatory eradication without compensation (Articles 8-11, Congreso Nacional 1988:6). As is to be expected, borders to these zones were not clearly defined and classification of the various zones was contested. Morales' administration have since changed the laws so that families in any region, including those previously considered illegal, are now able to grow one *cato* (a 40by 40m plot of land) of coca each (La Razón 2006; cf. Conzelman 2007:291-2; La Razón 2006d).

<sup>101</sup> Attempts were made to enforce the prohibition of individual *almácigos* (seedling cultivations) in the Yungas up until 1990, when it became clear that DIRECO officials working in the area were using their position for personal gain, and as a result, this practice was limited to those zones considered excess coca zones (Spedding, 2004:313; Spedding 1997:134).

I would suggest that while the killings of the UMOPAR agents seemed to represent a direct rejection of the State apparatus, since all the officers' files and papers as well as all other items of value were destroyed (Spedding 1994:198), acts such as planting a new coca field are not undertaken with the intention of defying the State in mind, rather they are logical acts intended to protect or accumulate economic capital. In any case, all of these examples highlight the ways in which control over the production and circulation of coca is contested. At the same time, cultural discourses about coca, coca growers and consumers are created and contested.

### **The Coca Leaf still stars in Twentieth Century Cultural Production**

As the war on drugs began, a new discourse grew up surrounding the coca leaf and the people who grew it. The fact that the coca leaf was not differentiated from, but was placed alongside cocaine on the United Nations list of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances (United Nations 1961), meant that the leaf was suddenly 'satanised' (Instituto Indigenista Interamericano 1986). It had become cocaine in the minds of many, such as political writers from the United States, Clawson and Rensaellaer (1996:132), who write that a typical farming family in the main coca growing regions of Bolivia might grow 'one or two hectares of cocaine.' By association then, the coca growers, could now add 'narcotrafficker' to their repertoire of labels that already included 'stupid' and 'uncivilised' (cf. Viola Recasens 1996:172).<sup>102</sup> Overnight, they had been turned into social delinquents (Hargreaves, 1992:45), as violently suggested by Clawson and Rensellaer, who once again conflate coca and cocaine:

It is humbling that a superpower such as the United States cannot exorcise a curse that has been laid on millions of its citizens. The temptation is great to say that Americans should go to the source and rip cocaine out at its roots in the three Andean nations - Colombia, Peru and Bolivia - where ninety-nine percent of the world's supply comes from.

(1996:viii)

Negative ideas and values surrounding coca and coca growers were produced through debate in United States Congress, broadcast to a wide television audience (cf. Thielen 2001), as well as through discussion at United Nations summits, where communication between country representatives resulted in laws that criminalised traditional practice. As a union leader, Alonso, a Yungas coca-grower, attended the annual convention on the coca leaf in Vienna in 1986. He, along

---

<sup>102</sup> As an example of the way in which discourse is created through labelling, a United States Department of State document (U.S. Department of State 2001) refers to coca growers ten times; once as having been involved in 'confrontations', twice as 'cocalero protesters', once as the perpetrators of 'cocalero violence', once as 'violators', once as 'coca growers' who had caused a set-back to the long-term strategy of effecting control over the legal market of coca, once as 'illegal coca groups' who had caused social unrest and violence, and three times as 'farmers' who had received US-funded and implemented development assistance. The word 'trafficker' was used many times and it was not clear whether a distinction was made between the traffickers and the 'violent' and 'illegal' coca growers.

with Evo Morales and six others, had been sent to represent the coca producers of Bolivia, and was able to witness first-hand the process of discourse creation at an international level.

We spoke everything that was the reality. They receive it, but they always reject the conclusions there. What we proposed, they gave us the answer, 'We'll give you money'... There in Vienna, they wanted the coca to disappear because there are many people... who are going crazy (from drugs). The coca producer doesn't make drugs. The producer plants his or her coca, harvests, sells, and that's where it ends. Of course, the very same North Americans, those same people from overseas are the ones who are really doing this.

The satanising discourse of the coca leaf is contested even at the level of the middle and upper urban classes in Bolivia, who know the soothing effects of coca tea, and tend to adopt coca as a symbol of autonomy from United States domination.<sup>103</sup> However, the coca growers, only ever portrayed in the national press as eternally protesting and blocking roads, have won themselves a reputation as troublesome and violent, and Chulumani elites complained that after the killings of the UMOPAR agents in 1982, that they were 'marginalised' as 'murderers' and no longer able to find employment in the city (Spedding 1994:198). The behaviour of the US-funded and trained UMOPAR agents is also an example of the way in which discourse was enacted and expressed at the local level. Carlson (2000:5) writes that 'these forces are notoriously repressive, revealing their racism and disdain for peasant lifestyle in their treatment of the peasants.' These agents contributed to a discourse in which coca growers were both 'backward', and 'criminals'.

At least perhaps until the election of Evo Morales as President, the coca growers did not have the authority to contribute very much to the creation of discourse at spaces such as the UN summit. But they did have and continue to have other opportunities to contribute to cultural production. They communicate with a large local and national audience by way of the instruments of production that are word of mouth (discussion in the coca fields, at the market, during exchange of products), through *sindicato* meetings and assemblies, through the marches and blockades that are organised through the *sindicatos*, through coca summits and pamphlet distribution, through the traditional practices associated with producing and consuming coca, and especially importantly, via local radio. Through these communicative acts, as will be discussed in following chapters, they work to produce new meanings and values about the coca leaf and about themselves.

After the election of Evo Morales, a former coca-grower, to the Presidency, the coca producers' communicative spectrum and their consequent leverage for control over the production of such meanings has widened even further. In March 2007, an article appeared in *The Weekend Australian* (2007) describing how a commission of coca grower industry representatives had

---

<sup>103</sup> When I told a middle-class, *mestiza* friend from La Paz of the topic I was planning to study, she was not atypical in her emailed reply: 'I love your topic, not only because of what is happening here, and because I find it interesting, but also because I believe that that way people over there will also realise the medicinal benefits of the coca leaf, of its possibilities such as tooth paste, and above all that coca is not cocaine.'



passed a resolution demanding not only that the leaf be decriminalised and exportation allowed, but also that the gargantuan Coca-Cola company remove the word 'coca' from what is according to a company spokesperson, 'the most valuable and recognised brand in the world'. One thing they cannot be labelled, is cowardly.

## **The Struggle over Material and Cultural Production continues in the Guise of Development**

### **From Stick to Carrot: Waging War through Alternative Development**

It was during the 1980s that the international community, seeing that eradication of the coca leaf was unlikely to succeed unless families had an alternative means of generating income, began to implement programmes that encouraged farming families to voluntarily uproot their coca plants in return for money or materials to be used for some other sort of income-generating activity. These programmes were known as *alternative development* programmes, not in the sense that this term was originally intended, referring to a less top-down and more participatory approach than traditional development practices (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 1975; Nederveen Pieterse 1998; 2001:75), but solely to denote the idea of crop substitution; development with *alternatives* to coca.<sup>104</sup> The view that the reduction of poverty is merely a means to the end of coca eradication, is stated quite explicitly in USAID documents:

The (USAID/Bolivia Integrated Development) strategy recognizes that sustainable development in coca growing regions is a legitimate USG (United States Government) foreign policy tool that effectively complements eradication and interdiction in pursuing coca reduction, but cannot reduce coca on its own.

(USAID 2005:37-38)

As Sachs (1992:4) writes, 'Though development has no content, it does possess one function: it allows any intervention to be sanctified in the name of a higher goal.' The higher goal to which development would lead in this case, was the control of coca production.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps the most (in)famous of these programmes was Agroyungas, a \$21.8 million UN-funded project that operated

---

<sup>104</sup> At the multilateral conferences of the Comisión Andina de Juristas in 1989 and 1990, most parties, including representatives of the Alternative Development Programme of Cochabamba, Bolivia (Decker Marquez 1990:17-23), and the Bolivian Workers Union (COB) (Escobar 1990:179-82) spoke of alternative development in these terms, expressing the need for local participation and for respect for the ecology of the area and the culture of the local people. However, as time has progressed, the original intentions behind the term 'alternative development' appear to have been dropped within the literature surrounding coca eradication. Within USAID documentation, 'alternative development' has become synonymous with 'crop substitution programmes' or indeed with development in its traditional top-down sense (US Department of State 2001; US Department of State 2002; USAID 2002). Recently, people have begun to promote the idea of 'desarrollo con coca' ('development with coca'), as opposed to alternative development, and referring to projects that work with the industrialisation and commercialisation of diverse coca-derived products such as tea, flour, balms, etc.

<sup>105</sup> See also the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Strategic Programme Framework 2005-2007 (UNODC 2005:5), which states that 'The transformation of the illegal economy generated by the coca-cocaine circuit, requires the reduction of poverty and social marginality of the farmer families involved in illicit coca production through their integration in sustainable livelihood programmes.'

in the Yungas between 1985 and 1990 (Léons 1997:149; cf. Léons 1993; Spedding 1989).<sup>106</sup> The aspect of the project that most people remember involved attempts to encourage people to exchange their coca crops for a new high-yielding strain of coffee developed in Colombia and Brazil, known locally as *café caturra*.<sup>107</sup> Individual families were offered loans of US\$2000 per hectare to be put toward the technical inputs such as fertilisers and insecticides necessary to yield the desired results from the crop (Léons 1997:156).

However, most farmers did not use the specified amounts of fertiliser, both due to necessary cost-cutting measures, as well as poor agricultural support from extension officers (Léons 1997:157). This, together with an inappropriate project design, an unforeseen 60% drop in world coffee prices between 1985 and 1990 (Econométrica 1990:245 cited in Léons 1997:159), and a devious bug known as the *broca*, all conspired to leave those who had made the transition to coffee in a very vulnerable position and much worse off than they had been before.<sup>108</sup> Lauro was only a young boy at that time, but he remembers and pinpoints the irony in the project aimed at replacing coca with coffee in his community near Chulumani:

The coffee brought results, but after three years it fell. It had a plague as well. It still has a plague. It seems like there used to be more coffee before. After the project, there wasn't as much.

Lauro refers to the infamous *broca*, a pest widely believed to have arrived with the coffee varieties from Brazil, and which affected 90% of the crop in some areas, including the traditional varieties (Léons 1997:157-158). Alonso, who is from the same community, refused to take part in the project but was affected nonetheless. He pulls a leaf from a coffee tree where we are sitting and shows me how it has been eaten by something. He says:

They even contaminated the criole (native) coffee. They contaminated that too... That coffee is useless now, it no longer has any weight, it no longer has any flavour, it loses everything, so that means it has no value. It goes rotten, like this. So what kind of business can you carry out with this *caturra* coffee? Nothing. Instead of helping us, they came to ruin us (*fregar*), as we say.

---

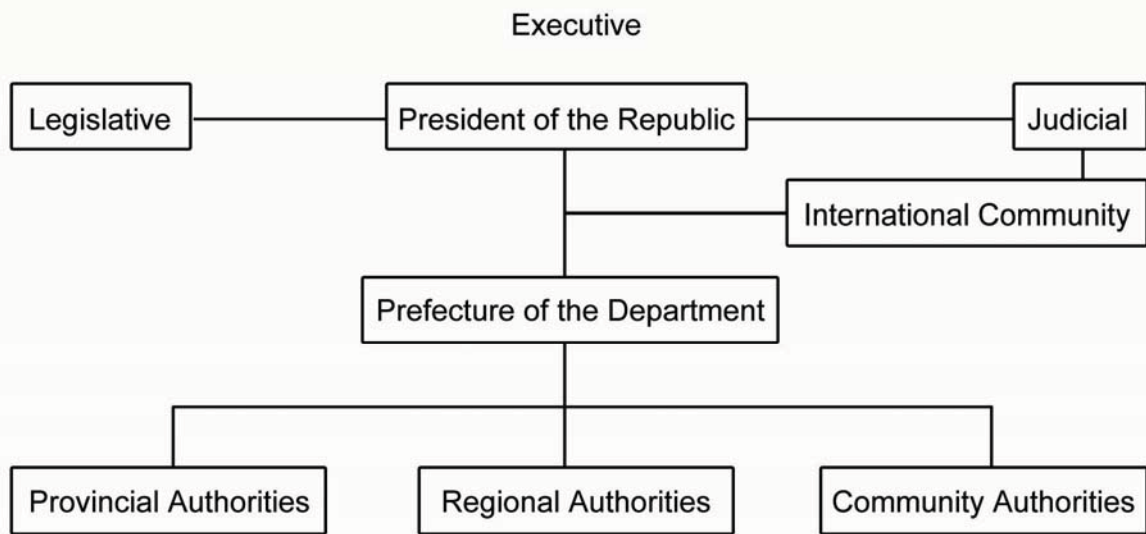
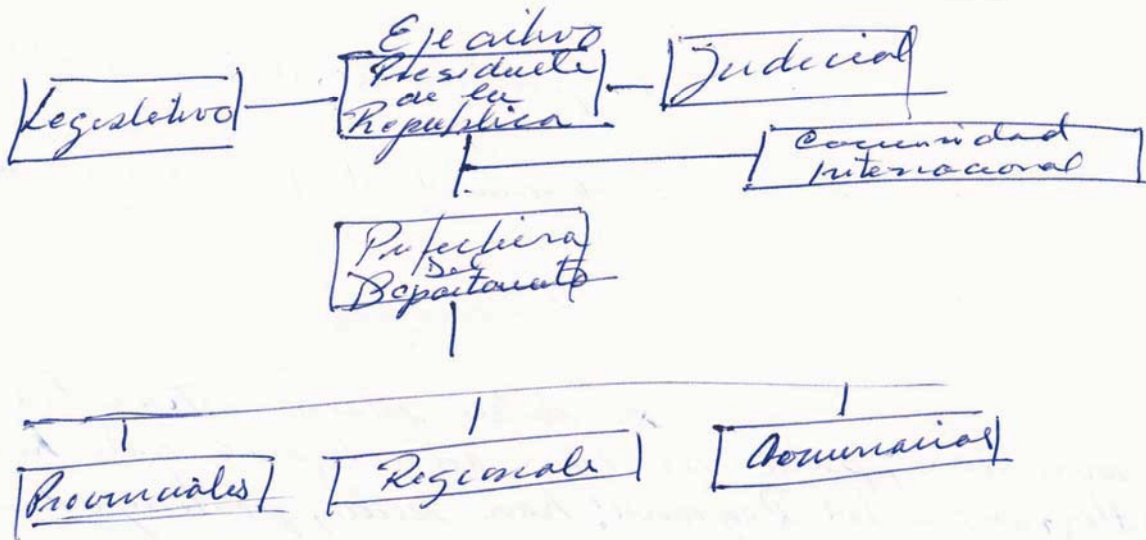
<sup>106</sup> The establishment of the Agroyungas programme was negotiated between the Bolivian government and UNFDAC (United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control), now UNDCP (United Nations Drug Control Programme). Léons (1997:149) writes that it claimed as its only purpose to 'diminish the economic dependence on coca of *campesinos* already cultivating it and to prevent its expansion in colonization zones.'

<sup>107</sup> In fact, the project involved four varieties of coffee: *catuai*, *caturra*, *catimor* and *mondo novo*, but all of these came to be known locally as *café caturra* (Léons 1997:156).

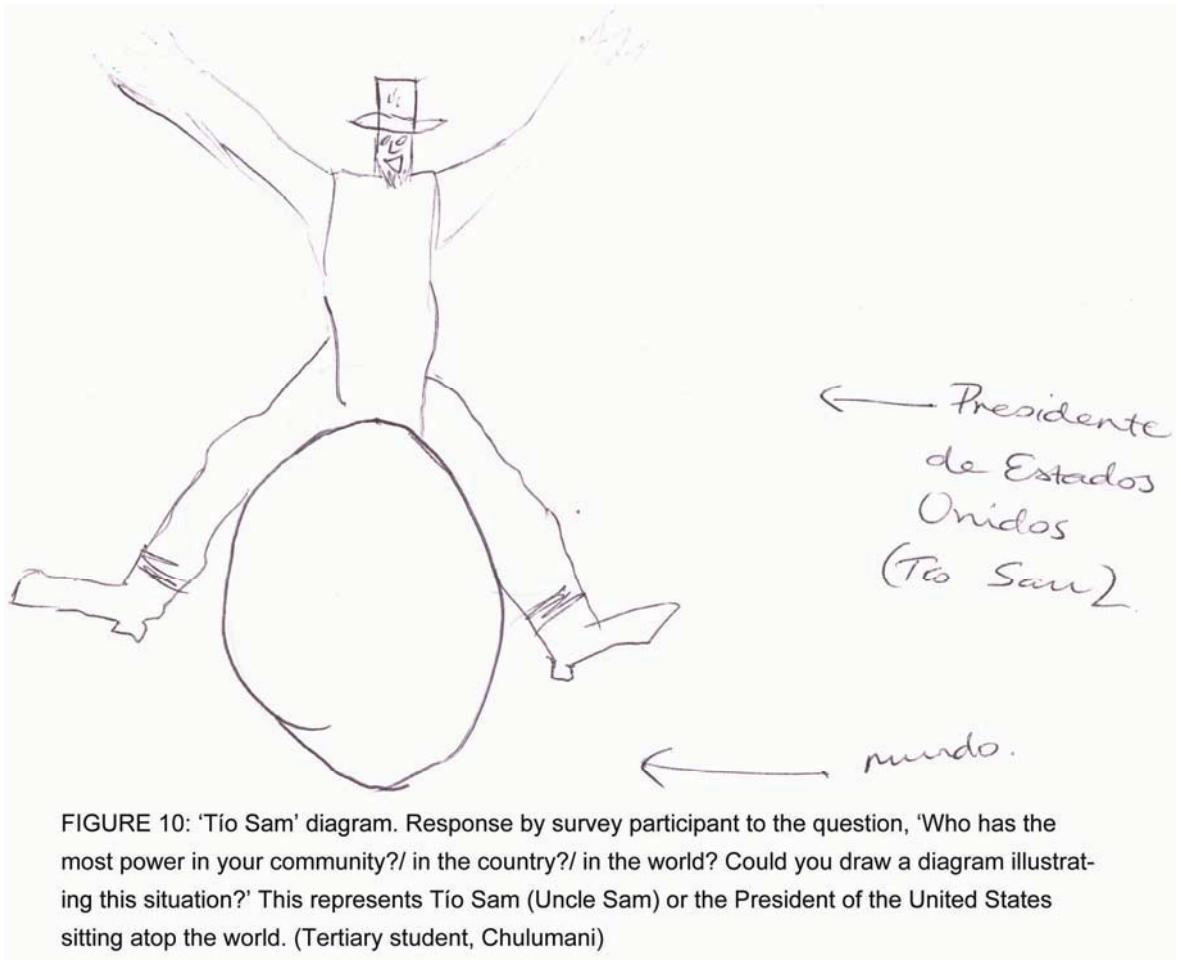
<sup>108</sup> The project was flawed in various ways, one of which was its failure to take into account the unusual topography of the Yungas, as well as the small-scale nature of landholdings, when modelling the project on agricultural practices used in Brazil. Lucas, a local agronomist who had been employed to work on the project, explained to me that the Yungas, with its drastically steep hillsides and with fruit trees dispersed throughout the fields, would not support the sort of machinery that could be used on Brazil's flat terrain. This, together with the fact that the smallest-scale Brazilian farmer owned at least 10 hectares of terrain, and was guaranteed purchase by the Brazilian government in the event of being unable to secure a market, meant that Yungas coffee producers could never compete on the same scale (cf. Léons 1997:156). There are numerous other examples of failed projects (Arce and Long 2000:170; Spedding 2004:38-50; Thoumi 2002:14-15). Others to have written on 'alternative development' as coca substitution in Bolivia include Aranibar and Alarcon (2002), Decker Marquez (1990) and Viola Recasens (1995), and in other coca-growing regions, Cano (2001), Thoumi (2002), and Morales Nieto (1994).

FIGURE 9: Power Diagram.

Response by survey participant to the question, 'Who has the most power in your community?/ in the country?/ in the world? Could you draw a diagram illustrating this



(Ex-school teacher, Chulumani)







**FIGURE 11: Drawing of ‘the reality of the Yungas’, showing a foot covered in a United States flag, stepping on a frowning coca leaf. Drawn by a group of participants at the Pre-dialogue 2004, *Movimiento Cultural Saya Afroliviano*. (Photo by author, May 2004). The Pre-dialogue was a two-day workshop held by the *Movimiento Cultural Saya Afroliviano* to ensure the participation of Bolivia’s Afrolivian population in the Constituent Assembly. This workshop, held in Chulumani, was one of a series held around the country. Groups were asked to draw on large pieces of paper the ‘realidad de los Yungas’ (‘the reality of the Yungas’) at the time. When explaining their drawing to the other participants, this group told that the picture represented the ‘politica internacional de la coca’ (‘international coca policy’). One man in the group said, ‘La planta es la justicia’ (‘the plant is justice’).**

Lauro's mother, Aurelia, remembers with regret how she agreed to take part in the project:

We believed what they told us. The coffee didn't yield – it was all *qulu* (dry) coffee. That coffee is not for here, it's for further in (at lower altitudes). The land is tired. We almost had to beg that time. When we planted our coca again, only then did we have enough to eat. We were destitute for three years. We had to work for other people. We haven't got our documents back... They didn't give that back to us. We were deceived in a big way.

But Yungas coca growers were not content to be the helpless victims in this stage of the battle either. ADEPCOCA<sup>109</sup>, the coca growers' 'economic arm', fiercely opposed the Agroyungas project, because of the fact that aid was conditioned on an agreement not to plant coca in the future. The local *sindicatos*, in turn, became all the more important with a newfound purpose in the defence of coca production, which continues to be one of their main activities and purposes today (Léons, 1997:152). In the early 1990s, some *sindicatos* prohibited their members from participating in alternative development projects, and expelled those who did so from the community (Spedding 1997:134), while local people showed their opposition to the Agroyungas project through their treatment of officials who arrived to recruit participants. Lucas, a local townspeople who was employed as an agronomist on the project, told me:

We'd go to a community, with the people from the *campo*, the *campesinos*. We presented ourselves. 'We are from Agroyungas, our work consists of this and that. Now, if you agree, we're going to give you machinery, coffee plants, citrus trees, materials for raising poultry, vegetables, everything. Now, it's up to you whether you accept us, if we can come into the area.' And the majority said, 'No, no no.' They whistled at us, they even wanted to hit us. 'No, because you're from abroad, you've come from the yankies, you're Russian spies, it's against coca', they said. 'No, no, no', they even wanted to hit us. We had to escape in the car and we never went back.

The final report for Agroyungas characterized the attempt to recruit communities into the project as 'extremely difficult and dangerous' (Léons, 1997:151). Subtler, 'everyday' resistance (Scott 1985) can also be identified in people's acts of exaggerating their coca extensions when registering for the project, and thereby maximising their compensation (Albó 1986:290)<sup>110</sup>. Others took the economically rational step of eradicating their old, low-yielding coca, and then replanting in another area after receiving the compensation (Spedding 2004:46-47). In 1990, the project withdrew from the Yungas, unable to account for project expenditures and facing fiery opposition from *campesino* organisations (Léons 1997:163). Since that time, people from the Chulumani area have no longer

---

<sup>109</sup> ADEPCOCA, the Departmental Association of Coca Growers (Asociación Departamental de Productores de Coca), was initially founded in the 1980s and represented the interests of the major coca producers of Coripata, Nor Yungas. It has now expanded to include all Yungas provinces and issues producers' identity cards, charges a duty for each *cesto* of coca transported to La Paz, and also promotes political activity such as protest marches and road blocks (Spedding 1997:124-125). ADEPCOCA registered as a 'civil group' (*agrupación ciudadana*) under new laws permitting civil society groups to run for local elections, and were elected into local government in Chulumani in December 2004.

<sup>110</sup> Albó (1986) is writing here about a precursor to the Agroyungas project, in Coripata.



agreed to any sort of crop substitution, having learnt too well the value of retaining control over coca production. However, while the economic impacts of this project and others like it have largely been erased over the intervening years, the social impacts continue to be felt.

### **Cultural Production and the Social Effects of Alternative Development**

The social dynamics of Alonso and Aurelia's community were never the same after the Agroyungas project, for it was individual families within communities that made the decision as to whether or not to eradicate their coca fields in return for payment, as opposed to a collective decision being made by the community as a whole (cf. Léons 1997:151; Spedding 1989:8).<sup>111</sup> This runs contrary to the dynamic of community-individual negotiation discussed in Chapter Three, where individuals may own land, but its sale and use is regulated by the *sindicato* (Spedding 2004:81; Spedding and Llanos 1999:46). As Alonso tells it, the result of this was that 'the community, at the end of the day, finished up divided in two'; those who accepted the offer, and those who rejected the project outright. 'Up until this day, we still have this problem,' says Alonso, who was of the second camp and still feels the division very strongly. He spoke to me about how he felt members of his community had betrayed the leaf that in fact they all depended upon to survive:

Those scoundrels, excuse the term, they're with coca, they're doing business with coca, they live from coca, those scoundrels, excuse the term. I always had problems with them. It's like killing a mother, because with that we eat, with that we live, with that the children study, with that we have clothing, with coca. So there's no alternative with other products, that's why we're really fighting hard.

Lauro remembers, all too clearly, the problems that this project brought to his family, who chose to accept the deal:

It brought... division within the community. Some say it was good, others say it wasn't. Up until today there is this division – some say, 'you eradicated'. My father participated. He had a lot of problems because of that. In the community meetings, etc. They persecuted him – there was a lot of argument between both groups.

While the decision to accept the agreement was for most people economically motivated, the social division described above is now enacted as one that had to do with a disjuncture in value judgements or a tension between conflicting versions of a discourse. Those who agreed to

---

<sup>111</sup> Léons (1997) and Spedding (1989) differ in their interpretation of the way in which the Agroyungas project was implemented. Léons (1997:151) writes that agreements were signed with whole communities, committing all community members to the pledge to cease coca plantation. This may be a reference to the latter phase of the project referred to by Spedding (1989:8), who writes that initially it was individuals who were approached to join the project, but that by 1987, project directors had become aware of the divisions that this was causing within communities and altered their tack to sign collective agreements of at least 12 households. In the ex-Agroyungas community I spent time in, it was certainly the individual approach that had been taken, as some households, and not others, had agreed to take part in the project.

eradicate their coca are considered, by those who did not, as having aligned themselves with those who condemned the leaf as criminal and anti-social. Both the forced and voluntary eradication programmes sent clear messages, via their actions and accompanying literature, about the value of coca and those who cultivated it. The choice of name for the government's 1998 forced eradication plan, 'Plan Dignidad' (Dignity Plan), seems to make a backhanded statement about the character of those cultivating the leaf (cf. Cano, 2001:5), while the Plan Trienal, drawn up in 1987, stated that the monetary compensation for voluntary eradication was designed to help the farmer 'to change his way of life and become a part of society' (Plan Trienal, cited in Carlson 2000:4).

It was at this time that writers such as Escobar (1984) and Esteva (1992) began to adopt Foucault's ideas of discourse to highlight the ways in which values and cultural products were created through development practice, and how people who became the 'targets' of development interventions internalised discourses of 'underdevelopment', or in this case indignity and anti-sociality (cf. Arce and Long 2000; Grillo and Stirrat 1997 and Rew 1997). Alonso describes with disdain how members of his community had appeared on a La Paz television station at the time of Agroyungas, saying 'that coca is a drug, that it is poisoning our children, and we don't want that'. He also believed that one of the conditions to which his fellow *comunarios* had agreed in accepting the project, along with not replanting or cultivating seeds, was to cease to engage in the customary practice of *akhulliku*, or coca chewing.

*Akhulliku* even gets you three years in jail for those who eradicated. It says it clearly, the 1008. And they accepted, those who went with Agroyungas.

While Law 1008 does in fact recognise coca mastication as a legitimate traditional practice (Article 4, Congreso Nacional 1988), what is interesting is the notion that an assault on the leaf was also necessarily an assault on the traditional practices surrounding the leaf. Such a notion led Filemón Escobar, former leader of the Bolivian Workers' Union (COB), to assert that the US War on Drugs and Alternative Development were a 'declaration of war against the Andean culture, symbolised in their intervention in this society through the coca leaf' (Escobar 1990:179). With past development interventions having been experienced by people in such a culturally violent way, it is perhaps not surprising that there have been implications for successive development organisations in coca-growing regions.

### **The Implications for Contemporary Development Organisations: A Continuation of Historical Local-Outsider Power Relations**

One of the legacies left by projects such as Agroyungas is a deep-felt mistrust projected by local people onto any development organisation wishing to work in the Yungas (cf. Putnam 1993;

Schuller et al. 2000:14-19; Campbell 2000:192).<sup>112</sup> On the one hand, the blatant profit that project employees enjoyed while farmers suffered was quite visible. Lucas admits, 'We, the technicians, were paid in dollars. We had good equipment, we had travel allowances, then we had vehicles with radios, all completely equipped'. Alonso says:

Imagine, they just came to deceive the people. That's all. More than anything, they robbed money. So much money that comes in from outside, just for this alternative development – everything goes in their pockets. The big millionaires. In the name of coca, they are millionaires. And they still want to annihilate the coca.<sup>113</sup>

Here, a situation is envisaged where outsiders come to exploit local people for their own economic ends. But further than this, development organisations working in the Yungas must also contend with the suspicions that they will arouse as the successors of projects that have had the eradication of coca as their explicit aim. The words 'NGO' and 'project' are synonymous with coca eradication.<sup>114</sup> Alonso tells me that the USAID-funded NGO responsible for building public bathrooms in his community is 'the same *chola*<sup>115</sup> with a different *pollera* (skirt)' ('la misma chola con otra pollera'), meaning that it is no different from Agroyungas, despite claiming to have nothing to do with coca. If we are to revisit his words, reproduced at the beginning of this chapter, we may come closer to understanding what the consequences of alternative development projects have been in terms of the contemporary relationship between local people and development organisations and their staff, and how these relationships form a part of a long history of local-outsider relationships characterised by inequality. He says:

They say that there are no conditions, but beneath all that... I tell you Señorita Nadia, all these organisations of NGOs are coming in here with lies. They will never tell the truth – not likely. Because that's the strategy of the North American government... We are always paternalised, we're manipulated, we're puppets for all these people. That is the worst misfortune of our people.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Putnam (1993:167) sees trust as an element of social capital, which can 'improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions'. Conversely, where trust does not exist, certain productive ends would not be able to be achieved.

<sup>113</sup> Another Chulumani couple who worked with various projects, as local agronomists, said: 'It's a deceit... There are projects that have disappeared. Nobody knows what the funds that were supposed to arrive for this region were invested in. They come and take photos, make big reports to show all the wonders that they've done, but here you don't see anything... It's a deceit to society. The NGOs have profit as their ends, personal interests... People allow themselves to be bought too, by the NGOs. They take the local leaders around in cars, etcetera. It suits the leaders... The benefits of the NGOs are for a circle of people, those who manage the NGO, and the leaders.'

<sup>114</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, when I showed my neighbours the 'Participant Consent Form' that my University required me to ask my informants to sign, and which explained the nature of my 'research project', they asked, 'What sort of a *project* are you doing?' I discovered that 'project' meant 'Alternative Development Project', crop substitution and coca eradication.

<sup>115</sup> Loosely defined, *chola* is the word used to describe a woman who wears the indigenous dress and it is generally used in a derogatory way. Originally, it was used to describe *campesinos* who had moved to the urban centres (Nash 1979:2). See Spedding (1996:30) for a discussion of the various terms used to categorise people.

<sup>116</sup> Alonso tells me that there are three phases in eradication: voluntary, forced and interdiction. He believes that since Chulumani coca growers rejected conditional voluntary aid, the development organisations have had no choice but to claim their aid would now be unconditional, while preparing for forced eradication. 'You don't want money, so we're going to get tough about this. Want it or not, you have to accept.' He says the third phase is soon to arrive. 'That will be with arms, soldiers, with military contingents, just like in the Chapare... Many people say we just have to receive (the aid). Logically, it's good to receive, but the consequences will be tremendous.'

Local people are attempting now to break with this historical trajectory of 'paternalisation' and 'manipulation', and are aware that such a possibility rests on their capacity to retain control over the production and distribution of coca. 'Coca is the only tool we have left,' says Carlos, a member of ADEPCOCA who is well aware of the strategic nature of coca in economic, political and ideological terms. 'Coca is like a jewel. With the pretext of narcotrafficking, other countries want to take possession of the coca, eradicate it here, in order to be able to have it for themselves.' He and his fellow Yungueños see the rumoured attempts to grow coca in the United States as evidence that that country's motives to eradicate Bolivian coca are driven purely by a desire to monopolise this valued resource (cf. May 1988a).<sup>117</sup> They also represent one more stage in the long history of unequal power relations that began when the Spanish conquistadors took control over the country's natural resources and coca plantations. Development organisations and their staff are implicated in these representations.

## Conclusion

After coca grower Evo Morales became President of the Republic in January 2006, one of the first tasks he undertook was a dramatic and symbolic nationalisation of the country's hydrocarbons, which involved the army, and large banners proclaiming, 'Property of the Bolivian People.'<sup>118</sup> The aim was to signal a reversal of the many years of inequalities that are understood to have begun with the Spanish invasion, and he uses symbols such as the *wiphala* (indigenous flag), and the coca leaf, to produce new meanings, values and discourses, and to demonstrate how a shift in the balance of power is occurring, not only materially, but culturally as well.

Yungas people like Benjamin and Alonso experience their contemporary relationships with outsiders, among them development organisations and their staff, as being built around a struggle over the control of both material and cultural resources, that has been in play since the arrival of the Spanish on South American soil. They see their natural resources – water, gas, coca – as being coveted by foreigners, at the same time as their cultural symbols – *charango*, coca – are being appropriated and reproduced by others. These two struggles – material and cultural – are interconnected, as a group's potential to maintain and structure the rules of a cultural hegemony, or to create and nurture a discourse, has to do with its 'position and function in the world of production' (Gramsci 1971:12). We have seen this where, at given times, different groups have had greater capacity to effect influence over such cultural artefacts as the symbol of coca and the identity of the coca growers, depending upon their level of control of and autonomy within the coca production system. The changes in the communication system that occurred after the Agrarian Reform are a case in point (See pages 60-63).

---

<sup>117</sup> The anthropologist Mauricio Mamani Pocoaca tried unsuccessfully to plant coca leaves in Maryland, USA, in collaboration with Harvard University. He concluded after this exercise, 'the coca plant grows like the *gringos*, slim, long, silly and without any taste' (Koka Zero 2005).

<sup>118</sup> This was one of the few occasions on which we were able to view proceedings in Bolivia on Australian national television. This banner, and the momentous occasion could be seen on SBS World News Australia on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2006.

As documented, the material and cultural struggle over coca has passed from phase to phase, from the time of the Incas to the Spanish conquest and the *hacienda* system, through the Agrarian Reform to coca's global expansion in the form of cocaine, and the resulting War on drugs, played out through forced eradication and Alternative Development. Perhaps Alonso is prophetic when he says, 'The fight will be permanent. Not only now, but always. The fight will be for always.' But just as 'Evo' was able, arguably because of his strategic position within the relations of production of such an important resource as is coca, to influence cultural production through various communicative mechanisms – first rallies and marches, word of mouth and radio, and now television and Internet – so too, Yungas coca growers have been able to use the communicative mechanisms available to them, to contribute to cultural production. They have done this through public protests, discussion in seminars and on the radio, everyday conversation and traditional coca chewing practices, all of which have contributed to an environment in which ADEPCOCA were able to become, in December 2004, the first indigenous coca growers' group to be elected into local government in Chulumani. It is unlikely that they would have been able to achieve such cultural influence if it were not for the economic and symbolic capital afforded them by the influence they in effect exerted over the production and circulation of coca.

The implication for development organisations is that upon entering the Yungas, they are entering a historical system of power relations, and becoming players in the age-old struggle over control of the production of material and cultural resources. They will become a part of the communicative ecosystem of the area; an ecosystem based upon the system of coca production. The following chapter will narrow the lens to provide a more detailed account of the coca production system at the local level and the way in which cultural production and the communications system is connected to it, with a view, eventually, to assessing how development organisations may hope to become a part of it.



### 3 RELATIONS OF COCA PRODUCTION, EXCHANGE AND CONSUMPTION:

#### THE BASIS FOR A COMMUNICATIVE ECOLOGY



**FIGURE 12:** Harvesting coca, with Chulumani in the background (top left), and a small Yungas community school and football field (bottom right). (Photo by author, March 2005).



**FIGURE 13:** Planting coca during a faena. (Photo by author, January 2004).





**FIGURE 13: Coca drying on a *kachi* (slate patio).**  
(Photo by author, April 2004).

You want to talk about connectivity? The coca is something that connects us. I don't know what you have in your country, but here for example, if I want to speak with you, I can't. I need something that connects us. And that is coca. I offer you coca to speak with you. To ask a father for his daughter's hand, I offer him coca. If a relative goes to live in Australia and I want to communicate with him and I don't know how, then I consult the coca. The brujo (wizard, fortune-teller) comes and he tells me how my relative is. The coca is always there. That is what connects us.

(Carlos Mamani, historian, La Paz)

## Introduction

It is Saturday morning and I am awoken too early by sounds of market. I peer out of my third floor window and down onto the plaza and the street below that upon my last viewing had been empty save for one or two caterwauling drunks dancing and singing to their own private rhythms. Now, transformed in the dead of night, it is a bustle with market stalls selling vegetables, fruit, rice, pots and pans, clothing, stereos, toys, coca, coca seeds, and from farther away on the *altiplano*, white salty cheese, salted fish and the dried salty meat known as *ch'arki*. Doña Isabela is working her blenders overtime as people order strawberry or banana milkshakes, and next door, early-morning visitors are partaking in the hot corn-based drink known as *api*, as it is ladled out of gigantic metal pots.

From up above I can see women wearing bowler hats and splendidly coloured *polleras* for the occasion, the full skirts that are a trademark of indigeneity, and babies comfortably lounging on their backs in the colourful *aguayo* cloth. Men in *abarcas*, the sensible tyre-shoes worn by those who work the land for a living, stop to pick up a tin of sardines, before heading up the hill to buy a new wooden *paleta* with which to plant their fields. Don Mateo is purposeful and must be off to see about some business in the town hall or at the bank. Doña Rosa ducks quickly past Doña Ana's stall, avoiding a debt. Many of these visitors will be gone by eleven o'clock, having arrived before the sun was up aboard the only truck servicing their community, and will not return until next week. Others who have less distance to travel will stay on, perhaps to visit one of the town's bars and to let loose after a hard week's work, much to the chagrin of the more responsible and female members of the family.

I head down my tiny, ankle-breaking staircase and find Doña Teresa (whose *pollera* shop is my entranceway) deep in conversation in Aymara with, as she calls them, 'las cholitas.'<sup>119</sup> They are friends of hers who come every two weeks from Viacha on the *altiplano* to sell *ch'arque*, and will return to their homes with some Yungas delicacies – mandarines, oranges and coca - but not before having shared a couple of beers with Doña Teresa and caught up on the latest gossip. A small boy interrupts, asking for some plastic from a big reel. 'What did your Mum say it was for?' asks Teresa's husband Ramón. 'Pa' carpa, pa' taparse, pa' coca, pa' qué?' ('For a tent, for a raincoat, for coca, for what?') 'Pa' coca,' replies the small boy and Ramón takes out the scissors to cut off the appropriate amount to make a sack with which to transport coca. Meanwhile, Lizet, a young friend of Teresa and Ramón, stops to tell how her hip-bouncing baby had been scared by two dogs fighting on the way to town, causing his *ajayu*, his spirit, to flee. Amalia, overhearing the

---

<sup>119</sup>*Cholita* is the affectionate term for a woman of indigenous dress (*de pollera*). It is derived from the word *chola*, which is only ever used in a derogatory context. See Spedding (1996:30, 33).

conversation in passing, tells her that she must return to the place where the baby lost his *ajayu* and cure him with smoke, or at least to blow the smoke in that direction. Lizet agrees, wide eyed.

The Chulumani market is a time and place where people from the communities, the town, from La Paz and from the *altiplano* share a communicative space; where information is passed on, corroborated, rumours begun and inflamed, bitter feuds enacted and protest marches discussed. As Mintz (1959:20) wrote, it is partly through the set of economic practices that ensure and maintain production and distribution, that social articulation takes place, and that the different segments of a society relate and interact. Here, the entire show is centred around the one thing that everyone has in common; coca. For all are in agreement that coca producers and non-producers alike sustain a livelihood only as a result of the economy generated by this commodity. This is reminiscent of Marx's notion that people form social relationships through the products of their labour, and that relations between people take the form of relations between the commodities (Marx 1952:31; cf. Appadurai 1988; Miller and Tilley 1996; Taussig 1980:25).

This chapter will argue that the coca production system, as it exists in the locality of the Yungas in current times, lays the foundations for an 'ecosystem of coca communications' (cf. Tacchi et al. 2003a), as communication takes place and cultural products come into being when coca is produced (in the fields, in the *sindicato*), when coca is distributed and exchanged (through trade and transport networks) and when coca is consumed (as a social interaction and statement). Wolf (1982:21) writes that for Marx, the concept of production was not merely economic, 'but also ecological, social, political, and social-psychological' (cf. Marx and Engels 2006). 'It is relational in character,' and embraces 'the social relations into which humans enter in the course of transforming nature' (Wolf 1982:21). This can be no more eloquently expressed than through an account of the way in which the life-cycle of the coca field is inextricably intertwined with that of those who grow it, as a young couple inherits and begins to plant a coca field in the first years of marriage, their children are old enough to participate in the harvest by the time the plants are yielding well, and the field will continue to produce for thirty or forty years, by which time the couple is old and their children have inherited land and begun to produce their own fields (Spedding 1997:67).

Communication and social articulation are thus guided by the prevailing relations of land ownership, labour relations, participation in the local organisational structure, relations of exchange, and communicative consumption practices. As these themes guide the discussion that follows, it will become apparent that differential positions within the system of coca production relations or the coca *field*, in terms of the varying types of capital possessed by individuals or groups (Bourdieu 1986; cf. Mauss 1990; Douglas 1990), are related to the influence able to be effected by these individuals or groups when it comes to the production of cultural products or discourse (Foucault 1972; cf. Durham and Kellner 2006). As discussed in the previous chapter, these differential positions are shot through with the 'thought categories' of ethnicity and class that

are a legacy of the Spanish conquest (Barnes 1954; Rivera 1994; Spedding 1994). All of this will be of interest when we begin to discuss the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) within the existing communicative structure, in the following chapter.

## Land Ownership as a Framework for Communicational Activities

### Land Ownership in the Yungas: Personal Capital Accumulation in a Communal Environment

Relations of land ownership underlie all other social and communicational relations in the Yungas. A continuation of the discussion of the land ownership system begun in Chapter Two will provide an understanding of the negotiation process between individual and community that Yungas people undertake as part of their daily social existence (cf. Komadina 2001:91-4).<sup>120</sup> It will also lay the basis for the discussion that follows, as a person's or family's land ownership situation determines the labour activities and labour exchange in which they are able to partake and their involvement in the social networks on which the labour system relies, as well as the extent to which they are able to participate in local organisational structures and decision-making processes, and the types of exchange and travel activities in which they participate. All of these, in turn, have consequences for the types of social and communicational activities in which they take part. This causal chain might be framed in terms of capital to be accumulated as one works to achieve a better position within the coca *field* (Bourdieu 1986), such that the possession of land (economic capital) facilitates the accumulation of labour, social capital, symbolic capital (converted from economic capital) and further economic capital (through successful commodity exchange), in a cyclical fashion.

The land ownership system in the Yungas today is, as discussed in the previous chapter (**pp.**), relatively open and fluid, and market-based (CIPCA 1976:5; Colque and Spedding n.d:19; Spedding 2004:81). After the Agrarian Reform of 1953, *hacienda* land was divided up into small plots and distributed between the *colonos* (Knoerich 1969:9), while a parcelary system of small family plots is thought to have been in place in the *comunidades originarias*<sup>121</sup> since at least the beginning of the Republic (CIPCA 1976:5; Colque and Spedding n.d:19; Spedding 2004:81). Today, these plots of land change hands either through inheritance or through sale, the latter being much more common in the Yungas than in *altiplano* communities, where there is a greater incidence of community controlled land (Rivera 1994:Chapter 2, p.3; Spedding and Llanos 1999:6-7). The difference is thought to be due to the greater commercial dynamic of agricultural production in the Yungas region (Spedding and Llanos 1999:72). With land being relatively freely bought and sold, the system would seem then to be largely individualist in nature. CIPCA write:

---

<sup>120</sup> See Komadina (2001:91-4) for a discussion of the tensions he believes Bolivians are experiencing as they negotiate the duality of being collective actors, while sustaining an individualist discourse that corresponds to modern politics and the market (ibid.:94). He sees individualisation in Bolivia as being a result of the representative democracy born in the 1980s (ibid.:93).

<sup>121</sup> These are communities that remained autonomous throughout the *hacienda* period. See CIPCA (1976:6).

The fundamental pillar of the economic structure of this region is, without a doubt, the direct and personal work of the *campesino* in the reduced field that the law recognises in the capacity of private property. The social organisation of production is, in that sense, essentially individual.

(1976:44)

However, it would be misleading to deny the role that the community, embodied in the *sindicato*, plays in the system of land ownership and exchange. Property that remained after *ex-hacienda* land had been distributed between the *colonos* as part of the Agrarian Reform became communal land, referred to as *uso común* ('common use') land. These lands are administrated by the *sindicato* in most communities, and any family belonging to the community may work (but not sell) that land, with the approval of the *sindicato* (Spedding 2004:81). Guillermo, a coca-grower from the Irupana area, explains:

As the community is *ex-hacienda*, there were lands belonging to the *patrón*... We, the children (of the *ex-colonos*), took over the lands of the *patrón*, to cultivate... Anyone born in the community (could do this). The children of those people who don't have very much, we've already gone in to cultivate the lands of the *patrones*... The State gave a resolution in favour of the *campesinos* of this community and handed over to us all the lands of the *patrón*. Now we have – it's already all cultivated by the children of the community members, all of it... We find ways of getting ourselves a piece of land here or there, but always within that which corresponds to us.

It is not only communal land that is subject to certain regulations, for while a person may officially own a piece of non-communal land under national property laws, he or she must consult with and seek the approval of the *sindicato* before deciding whether to buy or sell a piece of land, whether to install running water on the land and whether to plant a new crop or sign up for an alternative development project, making land ownership in the Yungas, according to Spedding and Llanos (1999:46), really more like usufruct for life. As discussed in Chapter Two, the decision of the Agroyungas ideologues during the initial stages of the United Nations-led alternative development project to approach individual families, taking the individual land ownership system at face value and failing to respect the authority of the community as an entity (cf. Spedding 1989:8; 2004:48), led to enduring social conflict within communities. It also resulted in some people being expelled from their communities for making individually motivated decisions in a communal environment (Spedding 1997:134).

During a *sindicato* meeting, I witnessed some of the negotiation that takes place as individuals attempt to balance their individual desires with community obligations. One man asked the community for permission to pass his land on to his younger brother and sister, which led to much consternation among those present. He explained, 'My coca no longer yields. It already has been pruned three times (*tiene tres pillus*). I have to pass it on to my brother; I have no other option. I



just have a house, water, that's all.' The implication was that the man would be abandoning his duties as community member. 'But he has to come and work,' someone spoke up, making reference to the community work days that are obligatory to all community members. 'Of course,' replied the man. 'I'll come and collaborate in the communal work days.' A well-established and vocal man within the community spoke: 'I don't like that word: "collaborate". It means he's going to come when he wants to, when he has time.' 'No, no, you're right,' pleaded the other man. 'I'm going to come and work, to work, to fulfil all my obligations.' Finally, it was ruled that the man could pass on his land. In this way, community members have the task of successfully negotiating what is essentially an individualised and market-led land ownership system that is nonetheless communally governed and structured. Barnes' diagnosis of a Bremnes parish rings true here:

People living and working together inevitably have conflicting interests but in general they have also a common interest in the maintenance of existing social relations. Individual goals must be attained through socially approved processes, and as far as possible the illusion must be maintained that each individual is acting only in the best interests of the community.

(1954:50)

On another occasion, a young woman who had been co-opted against her will into taking on what she considered would be a time-consuming role in a community development project (see Chapter Seven), asked that the *sindicato* sell her a prime piece of land near the centre of the community as compensation. The General Secretary declined to allow her to purchase the land, and announced at a *sindicato* meeting, 'It seems to me that people like that are no good for the community.' She had failed in the individual-communal negotiation process by laying bare the fact that her quest for personal capital accumulation outweighed her concerns for the greater good of the community.

As the young woman's story highlights, land ownership, while facilitating participation in certain levels of communicational intercourse, as will be discussed throughout this chapter, nonetheless brings with it certain social and communicational obligations. While migrant workers like Warita's family, or wealthy holiday-makers from icy La Paz are able to enjoy the benefits of a relatively free land market in the Yungas, although always subject to the approval of the *sindicato* (cf. Spedding 1994:48; 2004:81), absentee landowners who do not engage with the community on both a social, economic and communicational level become an obstacle to the smooth functioning of the system.<sup>122</sup> A *dirigente* (*sindicato* leader) from a community near Chulumani told me:

There are people who have their pieces of land there in the community, but they live in the city and never come to fulfill their (community) work days. We complained – they have to come and fulfill their work days and pay their contributions, or they're going to lose their land. The contribution is 2.50bs each month – imagine if they've been gone

---

<sup>122</sup> Spedding and Llanos (1999:47) write that the unrestricted sale of land to outsiders who do not reside in the community and do not comply with the obligations of the community, has in some communities had a weakening effect on the *sindicato*.



for six years, how much they'll have to pay. Sometimes we send notes to La Paz - they have to pay. Various people have paid in that way. They came quickly to pay their contributions.

Another man told how his *sindicato* had voted to declare that unacquired lands being sold to outsiders (*foráneos*) from Oruro should be returned to the community and distributed to the community's growing population of young people who were being left without land. Those able to vote, of course, were those who had land, which leads us to address the question of who it is that does have access to this both economically and socially valuable capital asset, and what the implications are for those who do not.

### **The Landed and the Landless: Ethnic, Class, Labour and Communicational Divisions**

Most, if not all townfolk own a coca field. In this, they coincide with the majority of *campesinos*. Land ownership, then, is not in itself a signifier of class or ethnicity with reference to our discussion in Chapter Two. As established, the signifier lies with labour, and this is where townfolk and *campesinos* differ. Some townfolk send workers to harvest their fields every few months when the time comes. Others, like my neighbours Teresa and Ramón, work their own land periodically, although Teresa wonders, bent low over the plants in the hot sun, 'How can they come every day?! I can't do it.' *They*, of course, are the *campesinos*, differentiated from her through their daily labour. Townfolk who own land will be part of a *sindicato* and will therefore be required to attend *sindicato* meetings, connecting them to a part of the communicative ecosystem that those without land are excluded from. However, because their usual employment (shop-keeper, tradesperson) is removed from the coca field, they are unlikely to participate in the reciprocal labour practices that are an important part of the ecosystem of coca communications. By virtue of their non-agricultural, non-*campesino* labour, they must correspondingly be *mestizo* or *blanco*.

Class and ethnic divisions between townfolk and *campesinos* are starkly visible (and therefore more often openly hostile than between other factions) due, in large part, to the dress that corresponds to the different occupations (and therefore ethnicities and classes), and that is a result of the dispositions corresponding to the two different habitus discussed in Chapter Two (Bourdieu 1977:86-7; 1984:172).<sup>123</sup> However, such differentiation is, to an outsider, hardly discernible within communities in the *campo*. Community members work hard to maintain the illusion that all are equal, dressing the same, engaging in the same work, and hiding their food at lunch-time to avoid betraying through their choice of comestibles, the differing levels of economic (and social) capital

---

<sup>123</sup> To take the example of Teresa, she wears the long plaits characteristic of indigenous women, yet distinguishes herself from indigenous people by wearing the pinafore and long skirt (not the traditional *pollera*) typical of town shopkeepers. When asked, she said that she considers herself to be '*español*', although she speaks Aymara and has an Aymara surname. Those who work in the fields will, naturally, wear clothes that are practical for such work. Aurelia, a coca-grower from a community near Chulumani, has a Spanish surname, considers herself Aymara and wears the traditional *pollera*. Men no longer wear traditional clothing, but certain items, such as the *abarca* tyre shoes, a peaked cap or a sleeveless woollen vest set *campesinos* apart from the other classes. See Spedding (1994:122; 1996:32) for a discussion of the clothes worn by different social groups and the associated nomenclature.

that are a product of land ownership differentiation (cf. Spedding 1994:147; Barnes 1954:50).<sup>124</sup> A family's socioeconomic status is determined by their level of land ownership, along with the social incorporation and respect that is a by-product of that.

'The poor people are those that don't have land,' says seventy-eight year old Don Anton, who lives in a small town and makes a living from agriculture. 'The unemployed people – they do paid work by the day... They have four, six children. They receive 20bs (AUS\$4) for the day's work. It doesn't go far enough.' He considers working for a daily wage to constitute unemployment precisely because wage-earners cannot rely on the stable self-employment provided by land ownership. Aurelia, a coca-grower from a community near Chulumani, says, 'Some people don't have any land. They have to divide their land up between three or four children. There's nowhere to cultivate.' She has twelve children, but as second-generation *yungueña*, is well established in the community, has coca fields of her own and is in a lucrative enough position to be able to employ sixteen-year-old Lupita, from the *valles* (higher valleys), who helps with the coca and the children in return for room and board. Despite enjoying the independence from her parents, Lupita holds the lowest social position within the community; having no land, she is wholly dependent on her landlord, emulating in a sense the relationship between *colono* and *patrón* (Spedding 1994:80-85; 2004:360; Spedding and Llanos 1999:158-159).<sup>125</sup>

It is an awareness of such historical relationships between Yungas people and outsiders that makes land ownership all the more important, representing both autonomy and a rupture with the *hacienda* era (cf. Lagos 1994:69).<sup>126</sup> Faced with a growing shortage of land in this ever more densely populated area, a man takes advantage of a Radio Yungas participatory programme to recommend against a trend of people selling their land to those from another class, labour group and presumably ethnic group:

There is a worry that many people are selling their land to people with money, to people from high society. Then they end up without money and have to come back to their land to work, but this time not as owners, but as *sla* (as if to say slaves) – servants. It is recommended that people don't sell their land, in order to avoid that situation.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> During lunch-time, family groups eat together, apart from the other workers. If I allowed the plate of food that my kind hosts had prepared for me to become visible, children would shout, 'Look what she's eating!', whether or not they had seen the contents, and Doña Dolores would quickly cover up the plate with the cloth that I had carelessly allowed to drop. The reason given was that, 'It might fall out.' Don Ramón, who runs what was once his family's *hacienda* as an eco-tourist resort, recounts what his father used to tell him: 'Before, when there was some communal work and so on, they laid out a big cloth on the ground, and extended the food so that everyone could share it. There was rabbit, cheese, etc. They ate well, like kings. What happened is that there was a war with Paraguay, and all the men went to the war. So, people arrived from the *altiplano* and from Peru. They brought their own diet, but they left behind the grains etc., the healthy part, and now all they eat is cooking bananas. Now they hide their food when they're eating together, out of shame.'

<sup>125</sup> Such a relationship is described in Aymara as that between *utawawa* (house baby) and *utani* (owner of the house). See Spedding (1994:80-85).

<sup>126</sup> Seen in this light, the Agroyungas project ideologues' sensitivity in commandeering land titles as loan guarantees is thrown into question (See Chapter Two; cf. Spedding 1989:7).

<sup>127</sup> On 16 November 2006, modifications to the land law were passed by the Bolivian Senate. The new law states that land that is not currently serving a social or economic purpose may be expropriated and allocated to indigenous or *campesino* families with insufficient land. These reforms have been violently opposed by large landholders in the lowlands of the country (Andean Information Network 2006:1).

The situation spoken of is one that would lead to a lack of economic capital, hence financial difficulties, but also to a loss of social and symbolic capital. It would lead to an inability to participate in reciprocal labour practices and an inability to participate in the local *sindicato*, meaning a foregoing of both status and social intercourse. With integration within the coca production system stymied, so would the potentialities for participation within the ecosystem of coca communications be dealt a severe blow.

## **Labour Exchange As a Basis for Social and Communicational Exchange**

It has already been established that the division of labour in the Yungas, particularly between coca producers and non-producers (*campo-pueblo*), is tied to conceptual categories of both ethnicity and class, so that producers are indigenous and lower class, and non-producers are *mestizo* or *blanco* and middle-class or elite (see Chapter Two; cf. Rivera 1994:Chapter 3, p.2; Soux de Wayar n.d.:2-3; Spedding 1994:133, 142; Vargas Llosa 2006). This section will describe a local labour system that is based upon capital exchange and which operates around a framework of social networks and alliances that work along and across ethnic and class lines. Within the coca *field*, it is those individuals and groups who possess the greatest amount of land and social capital, who are able to most effectively utilise their own and others' labour in order to best position themselves both economically and socially. It is also through the communicative interactions that occur within processes of labour exchange, that systems of ideas and practice are 'assembled, dismantled and reassembled', as per Wolf (1982:390-1). He writes that information and meaning are inherent by-products of the process of labour exchange, since the labour process is intentionally planned and conceptualised by social beings (Wolf 1982:75), and that it is through the deployment of labour that both material and ideational ties of human sociality are reproduced (Wolf 1982:75). The labour exchange that occurs then, is also social and communicational exchange.

## **Land and Social Capital become Labour Capital in a Yungas Political Economy of Labour**

The labour system in contemporary Yungas communities operates through a combination of traditional reciprocal labour exchange, known as *ayni*, and paid labour, known as *minga*.<sup>128</sup> The

---

<sup>128</sup> Certain moments in the life-cycle of a coca field, such as planting, or the first harvest or first pruning, will be marked by a festive work day known as a *faena*. These work parties have an economic as well as a spiritual value. A libation is made at the beginning of the day, with beer being poured onto the earth to ask the mountain spirits (*achachila*) to be kind to the plants. It is in the interests of workers to attend *faenas*, as they will receive food and alcohol throughout the day and are likely to carry on drinking and dancing throughout the night. It is in the interests of the owner of the coca field to hold such work days in order to secure enough workers, and the best workers, to carry out the task at hand. See Spedding (1994:78-79; 1997:55-59; 2004:141-144) for a detailed discussion of *faenas*. See Richards (1993) on similar practices in Sierra Leone. He writes that it is important to have the social skills to be able to call upon and command a large labour group at the appropriate time, and this requires the appropriate provision of food, alcohol, cigarettes and cola throughout the work day (Richards 1993:64). The same applies to the Bolivian situation.

Andean concept of *ayni* expresses, for both townfolk and *campesinos*, a relationship of reciprocal exchange, such that if I arrive at a *fiesta* wielding two crates of beer, this transaction will be duly noted down with pen and paper as I arrive, and on inviting the party host to my own *fiesta*, I can expect to receive the same number of crates of beer in return. Similarly, if a person makes an appearance at the funeral of one of my family members, it is expected that I will return the favour when the time comes (cf. Spedding 2004:25; du Toit et al. 2007:531).<sup>129</sup>

In labour terms, *ayni* functions according to the premise that equally valued labour will be exchanged between families, so that for instance, a family that requires extra labour at the precise moment when its coca field becomes ready for harvest, can borrow labour from another family, and then return that labour when the other family is in need of it.<sup>130</sup> This is an effective way, not of increasing labour capital, but of sharing it around so there are, theoretically, never surpluses or deficits of labour.<sup>131</sup> However, where a person does not have land or enough land to support external labour, it is most likely that that person will have to work for others for a wage to supplement any income that he or she may earn. And conversely, where the amount of labour required by a landowner to work his or her fields is greater than the amount the family unit is able to provide to others in return, this family must pay a wage (*jornal*) to workers to complete the required labour tasks.<sup>132</sup> I will deal with each of the different groups in order, beginning with those who are most involved in reciprocal labour.

In order to participate in *ayni*, a family must necessarily own land. In addition, there must be sufficient disposable labour within the family to be able to repay the work at a later date, as well as the ability to call upon labour from outside the immediate family via a social network which we will consider in terms of social capital. In both *campo* and *pueblo*, the families who are best able to utilise their labour for economic gain are those established families in the area that are at the peak of their labour life-span, meaning that both parents and children are able to work at maximum capacity.<sup>133</sup> It is also beneficial to have family members of both genders to be able to complete the largely gender specific labour tasks. Women in the Yungas generally undertake the work of harvesting, as well as all domestic tasks, while men do the work that requires less dexterity and

---

<sup>129</sup> du Toit et al. (2007:531) make similar observations in their South African study on the political economy of social capital. A woman is quoted as saying, 'One must go to other people's funerals in the village. Otherwise, no one will come to your funeral when you die. It is very important for people to see that you are going to the funeral, to see that you are a member of the community.'

<sup>130</sup> According to this credit scheme, anyone from within the family can be sent to fulfil *ayni* obligations, and one man's workday is considered to be equal to two women's workdays. Don Alberto, previously mentioned as the descendent of an *hacendado*, who lives on what was his family's property, will sometimes send one of his employees on the eco-tourist resort (a young man from the community) to fulfil his workdays where he is otherwise occupied.

<sup>131</sup> See Spedding (1994:74-77; 2004:144-146) and Spedding and Llanos (1999:151-184) for detailed accounts of *ayni* in the Yungas. See also CIPCA (1976:51-52) on the different modes of labour. See Lagos (1994:83) for a discussion of similar patterns of labour exchange in the Chapare.

<sup>132</sup> Traditionally this work was paid in products, rather than money. This practice persists in the *altiplano*, but is not the norm today in the Yungas. Sometimes a monetary debt may be repaid through *jornales* (work days) (Spedding and Llanos 1999:154). See Spedding (1994:74-75; 1999:151-176; 2004:138-139) for a detailed discussion of *minga* and *jornal*.

<sup>133</sup> Non-agriculturalists do not engage in *ayni* in the strict sense, although they do rely to a large degree on the labour of family members to operate their businesses, with members of both the immediate and extended family serving the customers, chopping the wood and killing the chickens. Usually by the age of around eight, children in the *campo* have learnt to harvest coca at the rate of an adult, and can trade their work day as equivalent to a full adult work day (cf. Spedding 1997:51).

more strength; the planting and weeding.<sup>134</sup> It is also necessary to have good relations with extended family, neighbours and *compadres* (godparents, see discussion below), with whom labour can be traded (Spedding 2004:145). Families well endowed with labour employ a combination of reciprocal and paid work to maximise their gains, so, for instance, on this particular day, Lizet takes the opportunity to join a busload of young people who travel to a nearby community to work as *minga* for a wage of 25bs, while her mother trudges off up the hill with her packed lunch (*merienda*) and her radio, to *cumplir ayni* (fulfil *ayni*) for a neighbour. Her father stays at home to dry the coca that has recently been harvested, laying it out on the *kachi* (slate patio) in the sun and turning it at the correct time, and her brother goes to *chontear* the coca field (to weed and loosen the earth).

Meanwhile, those who do not own land are necessarily excluded entirely from the reciprocal labour system and must work for a wage. Warita's family, having recently migrated from the *altiplano*, have no choice but to work others' land for monetary payment until such time as they are able to purchase their own land. As discussed above, those who do not own land are considered to be the poorest, not necessarily because they are unable to cover their basic needs, but because they lack the relative security, independence and therefore status that is afforded by owning one's own land (cf. Narayan 2000:31; Lagos 1994).<sup>135</sup> Also in this category are a number of townsfolk who form workgroups each day and travel to work as *minga* (paid labourers) on large coca fields that require extra labour. They work together as a group, and not with other *campesinos*. It is also more and more frequent to see large groups of *campesinos*, even whole communities, travelling to work for large-scale landowners in other areas, as does Lizet. She explains:

From our community they always go to other places to harvest. Because here there are lots of poor people who want to earn a living. In other areas they have huge coca fields. With big trees.

For those with land, there are three reasons why people might require more labour than they are able to provide to others, meaning that they are excluded from, or rarely participate in *ayni*. One is that they have large extensions of land. Often, large-scale landowners live elsewhere and only return to their fields in time to recruit workers for the harvest every few months. They will pay these workers a *jornal*, and will probably work alongside them during the harvest, but will not participate in reciprocal labour activities. Included in this group is the landowner that Lizet and her companions

---

<sup>134</sup> There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. Men will often be seen harvesting, although this is more often than not when they are young and single, or when their children have grown up and moved away, leaving them without others in the domestic unit who could complete this task. Likewise, women are not afraid to wield a pick-axe when the weeds are menacing and there is no one else on hand to perform the task (cf Spedding, 2004:131; 1994:73). Women must rise at four or five in the morning to prepare breakfast and lunch. After the day's work they must return home and prepare coffee and bread, and the evening meal. They are also largely responsible for caring for the children. 'The man just has to get up,' says Carola. 'He eats, and goes to work. He comes home from work, he rests. Then he eats. And sleeps.'

<sup>135</sup> Tales of the importance of land are also echoed throughout Narayan's (2000) study of people's conceptions of poverty in various countries. In her study of class and culture in the Bolivian coca-growing region of the Chapare, Lagos (1994:101,158) has documented the importance that poor *campesinos* place upon retaining control over their land and, as a result, the labour process. It is seen as preferable to forego a certain amount of independence from wealthier families with whom they must enter into borrowing and sharing relationships, than to part with their land and with the relative autonomy that this affords them.

have gone to work for. The second group are those whose regular labour activities are non-agricultural, such as in the case of Teresa and Ramón. Townsfolk who own land will pay workers to harvest their fields when the time comes. Again, they may work alongside them, but will not participate in *ayni* as the rest of their days are spent tending to the shop.

Lastly, there are those who lack the sufficient labour within the family to be able to reciprocate labour. Social capital in the Yungas begins with the family, as those without family lack the social foundation for economic capital accumulation because of their inability to draw on labour from within the immediate or extended family, or to rely upon a familial social safety net in times of financial crisis or shock (cf. Horst and Miller 2006:111; Lagos 1994:94; Wolf 1966:67; 2001:171).<sup>136</sup> As a result of this situation, they also lack symbolic capital and are viewed with pity. In illustration, as Doña Teresa and I walked to her coca field one day, an old man was spotted working alone. 'He has to work all alone because he doesn't have anybody,' she explained to me, regretfully. 'He has no brothers, no sons, no wife. Poor thing, I feel sorry for him. I wouldn't work anymore if that were me. I'd sell my land.'<sup>137</sup> The old man is joined in this category by Carola and Benjamin, who with only young children and no extended family in the area, do not have the capacity to return labour. Together with the old man, they are excluded from the system of social and economic capital accumulation because of a lack of disposable labour to trade with others. Keane writes:

...the political economy of exchange means that a group without good relations with strong affines lacks not only semiotic tokens of spiritual power and social standing, but also the economic capacity to forge further relations.

(1994:612)

Those without land and without sufficient social and symbolic capital are excluded from the reciprocal labour system, and their prospects for accumulating further capital suffer as a result.

### **Nurturing Social and Symbolic Capital and Converting it to Labour**

Those who wish to be a part of the labour system described above, whether through *ayni* or *minga*, must broaden their labour and employment base by learning to negotiate and cultivate, as well as maintain, social relationships from beyond the immediate family. As Bourdieu writes, social relationships that do not correspond to familial ties require constant negotiation and maintenance:

---

<sup>136</sup> With reference to the Chapare, Lagos (1994:94) writes that a large household was essential if families were to expand the amount of land under cultivation in order to produce a surplus to sell in the market. Extended families served as a safety net and springboard for the accumulation of wealth, as family members could be called upon to lend money to each other and to help each other with transport and labour. Wolf (1966:67) writes, 'Permanent massing of labour in a family is both a prerequisite and a consequence of economic well-being. Later, he writes, 'To the extent that kinship bonds constitute one set of resources for an individual or a family, the distribution of kinship alliances forms one important criterion for demarcating the classes of a society' (Wolf 2001:171).

<sup>137</sup> The fact that not long before, someone had stolen all the young plants the old man had been storing, ready to sell, emphasised the lack of respect (symbolic capital) afforded him by others in the community due to his lack of social and (consequently) economic capital.



The network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term.

(1986:249)

Especially important in this network of social exchange is the system of *compadrazgo*, whereby a person or a couple will be asked to enter into a relationship with the family of a young person traversing a life event such as a baptism or graduation from military service. The relationship that comes about between *padrino*, *madrina* and *ahijado/a* (godparents and godchild) and between *compadres* (referring to both godparents and the parents of the *ahijado/a*) becomes a permanent one. 'It's a bit like becoming a part of the family, more or less,' says Lauro.<sup>138</sup> Beyond the economic transaction that occurs when the *padrinos* provide the baptism gown or the wedding ring, a lifelong social relationship between *padrinos* and *ahijado* is extended also to the parents of the child, and a relationship of mutual obligation and trust ensues that can be called upon when labour or other assistance is needed.

As Bourdieu (1986:249-50) has written, a significant investment must be placed into ensuring that a relationship of durable obligation is experienced subjectively as friendship, respect or gratitude, such that during the initial formation of a social contract of this type, the parents of the prospective *ahijado* will pay a visit to the prospective *padrinos*, offer soft drink or beer, and coca, and spend an extended period discussing anything but the topic at hand, before finally broaching the subject with subtlety and formality, as though it were an afterthought (cf. Carter and Mamani 1986:281-5). Neither party must acknowledge what they have known to be the true purpose of the visit from the outset, and thus betray the underlying economic basis of this friendship (cf. Bourdieu 1990:126; Mauss 1990:5; Sahlins 2004).<sup>139</sup>

Likewise, when wealthy members of the community or town are asked to take on the role of *preste* for a community *fiesta*, meaning that they will organise and pay for the *fiesta* or perhaps provide the finances for the band or the food, the person is elevated to a degree of honour on account of their apparent generosity that is, although denied as such, founded upon economic capital. The

---

<sup>138</sup> There is no limit to the number of situations that require the sponsorship of a *padrino* and/or a *madrina* for specific purposes. At a wedding, separate *padrinos* will be asked to provide the cake, the ring, the band, and so on. A *padrino* might be asked to provide t-shirts for a soccer team, or musical instruments for a school band. But these relationships are not as binding as that of *padrino* of baptism, whereby a person will become a child's *padrino*, and the child's parents' *compadre*, for life.

<sup>139</sup> This occurs in both *campo* and *pueblo*. Keane (1994:621) draws particular attention to the relatedness of words and things, the simultaneous exchange of which, he writes, 'fosters, renews and concretizes the imagined community within which living people work to situate themselves.' Those who are best able to 'display to the world at large their ability to link these two dimensions of social identity,' will be most successful, and will enhance their chances of future success, 'by virtue both of the possession of objects available for use in exchange (an 'economic dimension') and by reputation for having used the forms of speech that are presupposably indexed by those exchangeables (a 'symbolic' dimension).' Bourdieu (1990:126) writes that it is the 'way of giving' that separates 'a gift from straight exchange, moral obligation from economic obligation (Bourdieu 1990:126). 'We might compare this to Mauss' notion of the gift, which he sees as being much more than an economic transaction, but which constitutes a 'much more general and enduring contract' (Mauss 1990:5).

economic capital that is invested in this project (often much more than would seem economically rational or possible for the individual household in question) is converted into symbolic capital.<sup>140</sup> This symbolic capital brings with it social capital, as honour and prestige attract (as well as being produced by), faithful social relationships, and these can in turn be converted into other elements as needed, such as labour (Bourdieu 1990:118, 125; du Toit et al. 2007:531).<sup>141</sup> This form of capital accumulation, writes Bourdieu (1990:118), expunges the necessity to maintain within the family, the whole of the labour force needed during the working period, and as such, 'Great families never miss an opportunity to exhibit symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 1990:119; cf. 1990:131; Barnes 1954:43).<sup>142</sup>

Having built up a stock of social and symbolic capital, there remains the problem of converting this into labour and maintaining these labour relationships over time. When it comes time to secure workers, a person must be adept at the art of begging (*rogar*), which involves visiting a person to ask that they come to work for you the following day or in the near future. Where a large landowner requires a number of *minga* on a certain day, he or she will hire a person from the community to *rogar* on his or her account, and this person will be paid extra according to the number of workers he or she manages to bring on the required day.<sup>143</sup> But beyond this, the aspiring employer must have a good reputation for either returning *ayni* in good time, or in the case of large-scale owners, paying the workers well, and providing certain supplements such as soft drink, or a decent form of transport for the workers.

On the part of the workers, it is necessary to learn to cleverly negotiate interests and loyalties in order to achieve the best immediate outcome for one's self at the same time as preserving and maintaining important social contracts with others within your network. Carola and Benjamin learnt early on that in the case of being offered simultaneous job opportunities, it is usually preferable to agree to all requesting parties, rather than to openly deny the social contract. On simply not appearing the next day, there is always the possibility of a mutual 'misunderstanding' that will avoid the necessity of open conflict.<sup>144</sup> In this way, they manage to act in their own immediate self-

---

<sup>140</sup> Bourdieu (1990:121) writes that the defence of 'symbolic' capital can sometimes lead to 'economically' ruinous conduct.

<sup>141</sup> Bourdieu recollects Malinowski's (1921) description of the chief as 'tribal banker' who accumulates and provides others with food in order to 'build up a capital of obligations and debts that will be repaid in the form of homage, respect, loyalty and, when the occasion arises, work and services, which may be the basis of a new accumulation of material goods' (Bourdieu 1990:125). du Toit et al. (2007:531) write that 'the creation of social debts and obligations, through feasting and visiting (during mourning periods) helps to establish bonds that hold localised reciprocal networks in place, but also fix collectively held notions of respectability, even in the face of poverty.'

<sup>142</sup> Bourdieu (1990:119) writes, 'Symbolic capital procures... the network of affines and relationships that is held through the set of commitments and debts of honour, rights and duties accumulated over the successive generations, and which can be mobilized in extra-ordinary circumstances. Economic and symbolic capital are so inextricably intertwined that the display of material and symbolic strength represented by prestigious affines is in itself likely to bring in material profits, in a good-faith economy in which good repute constitutes the best, if not the only, economic guarantee.'

<sup>143</sup> Spedding (1994:76-77) notes that a *mestizo* person or large-scale owner will always send a *campesino* to *rogar* for workers, rather than doing this him or herself, demarcating the communicative level on which these two different classes should interact.

<sup>144</sup> On one occasion, Carola and Benjamin promised to work for two separate people on the same day and, unable to make the choice, went to work in their own field, telling both slighted parties that they had awoken too late to put in a full work day and had therefore thought it best not to go at all. In this way, they preserved these relationships, and protected their fragile fledgling social network. This practice of institutionalised letting-down is embodied by its own word: *farsear* – literally to fraud or to fake (See Spedding 1994:77). Spedding (2004:145-146) writes, 'Social linkages and other acquired obligations (such

interest, at the same time as preserving the smooth functioning of the social system (Barnes 1954:50; Douglas 1990:xiii-xiv), and maintaining relationships that will be of use to them in the future. Hence, according to a schema that operates through the strategic exchange of gifts and labour, and where power relations are intrinsically linked to access to key resources such as land and labour, households and individuals are included on certain terms or excluded from various social networks and communicative avenues depending on their stock of social capital and their ability to work it to their own advantage (du Toit et al. 2007:531, 533, 535). Ethnicity and class inhere in this system of exchange.

### **Division of Labour: Reproduction of Ethnic and Class Divisions within the Communicative Ecosystem**

The interactions that occur through labour exchange serve to produce and reproduce social and cultural systems of meaning (cf. Wolf 1982:75). As already shown, the division of labour between agriculturalists and non-agriculturalists (*campesinos* and town or city dwellers) corresponds to the 'thought categories' (Barnes 1954:45) of ethnicity and class, and the fact that communicative networks between these two groups are not strong only serves to reproduce these divisions. Those who work in the coca field become privy to a wealth of information and gossip that is both a privilege and a duty of group membership (Gluckman 1963): whether Martina is studying in the city or married in Puente Villa, whether Emilio beat his wife and whether she deserved it, how to cure a back-ache or a baby, who is harvesting well, whether there will be another road blockade and how effective it will be (cf. Spedding 1994).<sup>145</sup> Rivera writes:

In these communities that are open and exposed to all types of circulation of people and ideas, the axis of communication and of the transmission of cultural normativity is the coca field and the *wachu* (coca terrace), where consensuses are created, but where unity is also eroded and permanently segmented with the deaf actions of divided loyalties, factionalism, envy and conflict.

(1994: Chapter 1, p3)

There is no replication in the town of the kind of group work that occurs in the *campo*, but an effective whispering mechanism nonetheless enables messages to pass like wildfire from street vendor to street vendor so that the news of a person's arrival in town, what they are wearing and what they plan to do there will reach the main plaza before they themselves do. True to the maxim

---

as monetary loans, having been aided in the case of illness, etc.) influence the decision of preferring to go to work for one person and not for another.'

<sup>145</sup> Gluckman (1963) took a functionalist approach to gossip as a process that is culturally determined and sanctioned, and which has customary rules and important functions (Rapport and Overing 2000:153). He writes that gossip helps to maintain group unity, morality and history and that it serves as constant communal evaluation and reaffirmation of behaviour (ibid.). It also allows for differences of opinion to be expressed and struggled with behind the scenes, since groups are able to assess individuals for their qualities and moral character, 'without ever confronting them to their faces with failures in any sphere' (Gluckman 1963:313). An outward appearance of social harmony can thereby be maintained (Rapport and Overing 2000:153).

proudly declared by Chulumaneños, 'pueblo chico, infierno grande' ('small town, big hell'), the concept of a secret in Chulumani is an oxymoron. But while information criss-crosses from town to coca field and back again, exchanged especially on market days, there is an extent to which those who do not participate in coca production work are excluded from the communicative network that has its nexus in the coca fields, and vice versa with respect to those who do not work in the town, reproducing ideas of inherent divisions between the two groups.<sup>146</sup> Information from the other group becomes a valuable commodity, and Mariana talks quietly as she tells me that her brother-in-law, a *campesino*, had 'been at the meeting', and said that they would be leaving for the blockade on Tuesday, midnight.

Where these two groups do coincide in labour, the scenario is usually one in which a *campesino* is working for a *mestizo* or *blanco*, either in their fields, or in some other form of employment, for a wage. It could be said that where someone is paid for their labour as a market transaction whereby a net transference of labour from one household to another occurs, as opposed to the equivalent return that can be assured through *ayni*, the result is 'an asymmetrical relationship between classes' (Wolf 1982:354; cf. Spedding and Llanos 1999:156). Such a situation could be said to have occurred when Doña Rigoberta, who owns a shop in town, asked elderly Doña Jacoba to help her harvest her coca field. Doña Jacoba walked to the coca field from her house, way up the mountain near a small community, where she has lived alone since her husband died two years ago. When it came time to break for lunch, Doña Jacoba climbed high up the terraces to eat alone. Doña Rigoberta called to the elderly woman to come and eat with us, and when she did not come, Doña Rigoberta gathered up a package of lunch, some papayas from the tree, and some coca, and climbed up the hill to offer this to Doña Jacoba, unacknowledgedly as part of her payment (cf. Bourdieu 1977:173; 1990:126).<sup>147</sup> Of course, the woman had brought her own lunch, but accepted, feigning surprise at the offering. We ate fresh meat cooked in flour, fried egg and even mayonaisse squeezed from a small plastic sachet, luxuries unlikely to be found in the packed lunch of many *campesinos*. When I asked Doña Rigoberta if the woman had come as *ayni* or *minga*, she replied, 'As minga. I'm going to give her some money (*algo de plata*). Just as minga. As if I would go up there! So far!' By this, she meant that it was not worth her while to pay the woman in labour, by climbing the mountain to return equivalent labour to her own coca field in *ayni*. Since she had the disposable cash, it was easier simply to pay her.

Unequal transactions of this type occur wherever one partner is 'clearly superior to the other in his or her capacity to grant goods and services' (Wolf 2001:179). This is a likely scenario within the system of *compadrazgo*, for while this relationship is often between equals, it is just as likely to be a relationship between people of different social classes due to the economic and symbolic capital

---

<sup>146</sup> As mentioned, there are groups of townfolk who travel to work daily on large properties. However, they do not connect into the communicative web centred around the communities, as they work together in groups and not with other *campesinos*.

<sup>147</sup> Bourdieu (1977:173) recounts the tale of a French mason in the 1950s who upon finishing a house, declined to eat the meal offered to him according to the custom, instead demanding an increase in salary in lieu of the meal. This acknowledgement that the meal was not truly a generous gift, but an interested transaction with a cash equivalent, caused a scandal.

that enlisting a wealthy person as your child's *padrino* or *madrina* entails. The same occurs where residents of Germán's community receive assistance and transport from the *hacendado*'s descendent in exchange for their loyalty to him, and the carpenter employed at a wood merchant's in town is able to use the machines to fabricate his own creations in his free time, in exchange for staying late the previous night to unload wood. Here, we are faced with a patron-client relationship reflective of the usufruct privileges granted to *colonos* during *hacienda* days.

However, there is good motivation for seeking to enter into such unequal relationships, and part of the reason for the investment placed in building 'vertical ties' with the upper classes, as documented by CIPCA in 1976 but still prevalent today, is due to a desire to achieve social mobility as people from agricultural backgrounds work hard to climb the social (and ethnic) ladder by breaking into the coca intermediary or transport businesses or by sending their children to study in the city with a view to abandoning the rural area altogether (CIPCA 1976:42; cf. Nash 1979:11; Spedding 1994:146; Lagos 1994:130).<sup>148</sup> As discussed, a change in labour means a change in class and ethnicity, and so it is when my four-year-old godchild is excited at what she perceives to be the prospect of going to Australia and becoming a *gringa*.

Importantly, it is likely to be those poorer members of the community who do not own land or very much land of their own, who would take on paid work in the employment of someone from another labour category, in exactly the same way that they would within their same labour group, for it is not only between 'ethnic' groups that relationships of unequal exchange occur. Spedding and Llanos (1999:157) write that 'the most feasible way of distinguishing rich, medium and poor domestic units... is according to the flows of labour force.' Wealthy *campesino* families, they write, are more likely to be employing at least one paid worker at the same time that a poorer family is likely to have at least one member of the family employed in wage labour outside the domestic unit (*ibid.*). Those who must depend on established families for employment are thereby subordinated to them in various ways for if they are truly dependent on acquiring that labour, they find themselves with little bargaining power in terms of rate of pay and conditions (cf. *ibid.*:164-165).

There is a certain power tussle between employers and paid workers, such that Doña Raquela complains that it is difficult to find *minga* to harvest her field, which is one hour's walk from the community. 'They want 30bs,' she says. 'And then they only arrive around 10 a.m. and work until 4 p.m.. They don't arrive and get straight to work either; they sit and *bolear* (chew coca) for ages first. *Así es la gente*. (That's how people are). They didn't use to be like that.' Likewise, when a group of harvesters was taken from one community to another to harvest a large landowner's field, the workers began to agitate at 4 o'clock. 'Let's go,' they shouted, 'vamos!' The owner, who had made the trip from La Paz especially to harvest his field begged them to stay and finish the harvest. 'I'll

---

<sup>148</sup> Lagos (1994:130) writes that in the Chapare, peasants tend not to oppose merchants as a class, but divide into factions and align with non-peasant groups. This is because of the intimate relationships that they develop with particular households in order to produce cash crops. Rather than depending on the wealthy for access to land, since they now own their own land, peasants today depend on wealthy households for money and assistance in confronting crises (Lagos 1994:159).

raise your pay by 3bs.' There was grudging agreement among the workers, but by 6 o'clock, with the field just finished, there was much resentment, further incensed by the long walk back up the hill to the truck. Lizet, who had been enlisted to beg (*rogar*) the workers, said to the owner, 'You're going to have to raise the pay again and give them soft drink or they won't want to work for you again. It makes me look bad too.' The owner replied that of course he would provide more soft drink, but he could not raise the pay any further. He had to take into account soft drink, transport, and so on. 'It doesn't add up. You have to do the maths.'

These workers, knowing that the land owners depended on them for their labour, exercised a certain influence, keeping in check any exploitation that may occur within these relationships of market transaction. Yet these workers had the ability to exert force as a group because they too have land of their own and economic capital to fall back on. Confused, I put it to Doña Raquela that surely it was against the workers' interests to demand 30bs for the day's work, because rising wages would result in them having to pay their workers more when they were in need of *minga*. She replied that yes, everyone has their own coca fields, so they only go to work for whoever pays them the most. As established land owners, they are able to participate in the reciprocal system of *ayni*, and thus only need undertake paid work when it is in their best interests to do so.

Carola and Benjamin do not have that level of choice available and cannot make the same demands to employers. Lacking land and an established social network, they are obliged to respond to the labour demands of the family whose house they are renting, in a relationship not unlike that between *colono* and *patrón*. On one occasion, Benjamin was angry at having to decline a man who had come to beg him to work the next day on account of the fact that his landlady had already laid claim to his labour. 'She wants to take us everywhere,' he said, 'and gets cross when we don't go for her.'

Labour practices and labour exchange serve to reproduce divisions in terms of ethnicity and class (agriculturalist, non-agriculturalist), and also within labour groups, such that ideas and practice are 'assembled, dismantled and reassembled' through labour processes. But labour does not stand alone in this system of human interaction and communication. Participation in labour exchange is dependent upon land ownership, and both land and labour lay the basis for participation in the local political system. The local *sindicato* is an important space for established *campesino* families to exert their influence, work to accumulate further capital, and to contribute to the production of social and cultural meaning.



## The Local Sindicato as a Communicative Forum Representing Communities and Individuals

### Sindicatos as a Representative, Communicative Body For a 'United' Labour Force

The *sindicato* system, as discussed in Chapter Two, was implemented in Bolivia by the MNR government after the Agrarian Reform of 1953, and with this restructuring came a change in the way that *campesinos* were able to communicate with those beyond their locality (Healy 1985; Heath 1973; Komadina 2001; Lagos 1994; Rivera 1986).<sup>149</sup> The local *sindicato*, which corresponds to a given community which may have anywhere from 20 to 800 inhabitants (INE 2007), answers to the *Campesinos'* Federation, the *Federación Provincial Unica de Trabajadores Campesinas de Sud Yungas*, based in Chulumani.<sup>150</sup> The *Federación* has become for the *campesinos* an avenue of expression against other social sectors, representing them in dealings with NGOs, the Catholic Church, local and central government (Colque and Spedding n.d.:Chapter 3, p.6). This entity makes decisions about when it is necessary to pressure the government on issues such as coca eradication, and calls the *sindicatos* to action by way of mobilisations and road blockades. Its economic arm is ADEPCOCA.

CIPCA (1976:45-50) describe a period during which syndical activity stagnated in the Yungas and, in some communities, became non-existent, in large part due to government action: first fragmentation of the *sindicato* structure under Barrientos in the 1960s, followed by the interruption and repression exercised by Banzer's military dictatorship (CIPCA 1976:45-50; Rivera 1986:86).<sup>151</sup> However, they came upon a new purpose during the democratic 1980s, that being to lobby for greater access to the rural development resources arriving for *campesino* communities via the central government (Healy 1985:3). In the Yungas, this manifested itself in dealings with alternative development projects, and the *sindicatos* became and continue to be instrumental in defending the coca leaf in the face of international pressure to eradicate (Léons 1997:152; Rivera 1994:Chapter

---

<sup>149</sup> There had been attempts at the formation of such *campesino* organisations prior to that date, but the leaders of such movements had been detained or persecuted (Spedding 2004:276). See Ponce (1969) for a historical overview of the Bolivian *sindicato* up until the end of the 1960s. See also Lagos (1994:49, 52) on the role of the *sindicato* in the Chapare. She writes that the Chapare *sindicato* was instrumental in the implementation of the Agrarian Reform in 1953, in seizing land, pressuring the government to decree a reform law, and initiating legal procedures for the distribution of land. She also writes that the state played a crucial role in influencing the course of the structural and political changes that occurred in Bolivia, and was able to control the peasant movement through the *sindicato*, by 'defusing and dividing the movement, favouring corrupt leaders and repressing others' (Lagos 1994:49).

<sup>150</sup> Sole Provincial Federation of *Campesino* Workers of Sur Yungas. The community *sindicato* exists within a multi-tiered structure and is subordinated to the sub-central (canton), which lies beneath the central (sub-region), followed by the provincial-level federation, which in turn is subordinated to the national *campesino* union CSUTCB (*Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* or United Syndicate Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (Healy 1985:4; cf. Conzelman 2007:9). Caroline Conzelman's (2007) doctoral thesis, *Coca Leaf and Sindicato Democracy in the Bolivian Yungas*, is based mainly on research in the Nor Yungas capital of Coroico and deals with Andean models of democracy as practised within the *sindicatos*. See also CSUTCB (n.d.) and García Arganaras (1992).

<sup>151</sup> In a study of Sud Yungas, CIPCA (1976:45) described the syndical activity that they found in Yungas communities to be 'languid' and practically non-existent. The team believed, however, that the governmental suppression was not the cause, but rather the 'occasion' for the communities' inactivity, this being due instead to a lack of interest on the part of the *comunarios*. However, one of the reasons interview participants of the CIPCA study gave for not wishing to attend meetings was a fear of being repressed. The others were not wanting to waste time discussing irrelevant matters when they could be working, and the fact that, since the end of the *hacienda* period, they no longer felt obliged to attend (CIPCA 1976:50).

2, p5). Via strategic use of the media (Healy 1986:25), and through symbolic mobilisations, blockades and sit-ins (Healy 1986), the *sindicatos* have worked to produce new meanings and values. In the case of the coca growers, these were about coca and about themselves.

In their role as representative bodies, the *sindicatos* must present themselves as a unified community, and not as a group of individuals with disparate interests (cf. Barnes 1954:50). This holds also, where a community, represented by the *sindicato*, must present itself to a development organisation for funding. Guillermo, a *dirigente* (*sindicato* leader) from a predominantly Afro-Bolivian town in the Irupana area, told me that Irupana had been more successful than Chulumani in terms of rural development because of the way the *sindicatos*, the *Federación* and the local council showed that they were able to coordinate and work well together:

I think the NGOs, having seen that the Municipality and the *Federación* are two entities that are combined and are coordinated in these works, the NGOs no longer have mistrust to come into the Municipality, because they know that there won't be any problems there.

He described to me the way in which the *sindicato* system provides a communicative mechanism via which messages are relayed from the Municipality to the *Federación* and down to the *sindicatos*, using a combination of radio and community loudspeaker:

The Municipality informs the *Federación* that they're going to work the roads in the Chicaloma sector, the *Federación* sends an announcement; it says, 'Good companions', the General Secretary (of the *sindicato*) calls and... so we go down to the grassroots (*bases*), we call a meeting, 'Good companions, the machinery will arrive such and such a day, we have to work'. And we all put ourselves to work... If the Mayor had to coordinate with the communities, he'd have to go community by community, call meetings... He just goes to the *Fede*... The *Fede* sends a message, communicates with the *Centrales*, the *Centrales* call here... It's like a branch, which comes and distributes itself.

### **Sindicatos as a Communicational Forum for Certain 'Organisms' in the Ecosystem of Coca Communications**

To qualify as eligible to be a member of a local *sindicato*, one must own land, which immediately excludes certain members of the population, including townfolk without land, the poorer members of communities, and migrant labourers. Whilst the various sectors within the *pueblo* have *sindicatos* (such as the market stall holders or food sellers), they could be said to lack the purpose that the coca *sindicatos* have, and townfolk often complain that when a meeting is called, no one will attend. 'They're really good at complaining in the street,' says Doña Teresa of her fellow townfolk, but there's no way you'll see them in a meeting.' It is when the various *campesino sindicatos* are

called to a meeting in the central location of Chulumani to discuss, for instance, a mobilisation against the government, that the differences are most acutely felt between *pueblo* and *campo*, ironically at a time when their interests most coincide. In these instances, townfolk excluded from the *sindicatos* must content themselves to waiting to hear from a *campesino* friend or family member, or listening to the radio, before being enlightened on a version of the outcome of the meeting. The reason for this is the fear that sensitive information will be passed onto the government, presumably by someone from the *pueblo*.<sup>152</sup>

Within the communities, land ownership is not enough to qualify a person for membership to a *sindicato*, and when I asked Carola if she went to the *sindicato* meetings in the community in which the family had settled, she said, 'No, they don't take us into account. Only those who have *cocales* (coca fields).' 'But you have a *cocal*,' I countered. 'Ah, but only recently. And only those who receive *cocales* from the *sindicato* go to the meetings. Not those who buy land.' Spedding and Llanos (1999:53) have written that membership is fairly exclusive and new members must have been resident in the area for several years and pay a fee to enter. Full members are called *sayañeros*, and since the inheritance of freeholding *sayañas* (plots) has only existed for a generation or so, there is some confusion as to who should be allowed to inherit the rank of *sayañero* (all the offspring, only one, and so on), and whether those who buy land should be able to achieve this position (Spedding 1994:151-152). In any case, it is the established, landowning families who constitute the membership of these organisations.

Those who do become members are able to make use of the communal infrastructure, communal lands, dispute resolution services and can enjoy recognition as the legitimate owner of a piece of land (Colque and Spedding n.d.:Chapter 3, p.4). In return they must fulfil various obligations, such as attending monthly meetings, paying a monthly contribution, participating in communal workdays (to harvest the communal coca field or help dig a new road or football field), accept leadership roles and, if necessary, attend a road blockade or protest.<sup>153</sup> 'I have a suggestion that we bring forward the work day on the 15<sup>th</sup>,' one *dirigente* said during a meeting, 'because we have to pay the electricity. We're already two months behind and they can cut us off. Can we put the work day forward to Monday?' A vote was taken and the consensus was 'no', after which the *dirigente* said, 'Fine, we'll work on the 15<sup>th</sup> then, but if they cut the electricity off, don't say anything to me.' All of these benefits and obligations imply a level of integration within the community, and a level of inclusion within a communicative network from which those who are not members are largely excluded.

---

<sup>152</sup> Townfolk who tried to enter the Municipal Theatre where a meeting was being held to elect candidates for ADEPCOCA for the up-coming municipal elections, were told that the meeting was only for *campesinos*. A *blanco* (white man) from the town was declined the opportunity to run for nominations to represent ADEPCOCA and entered local council with another party instead.

<sup>153</sup> Any person who owns a piece of land in the community must fulfil some of these obligations to the *sindicato*, whether or not he or she is a member (Spedding and Llanos 1999:53).

Those who attend the monthly meetings (or perhaps weekly for *dirigentes*), gain special knowledge about the ins and outs of the community, the situation of the local school, activities and *fiestas* that are being planned, the political situation, and so on. These meetings provide an avenue through which to complain about an incompetent teacher, to accuse someone of a theft, to bring up the issue of a disputed land settlement, to suggest participation in a football championship or intercommunity *fiesta*, to organise the logistics of a road blockade, or to call upon neglectful members to attend Church. 'Let's all of us go to Church, let's support the catechist,' rallied the General Secretary after the catechist had expressed his vexation at preaching to empty pews at 5 a.m., announcing that he would resign the following year. *Dirigentes* also attend *ampliados* (general meetings) at the *Federación* in Chulumani that are held whenever an issue presses throughout the year, and will report to their community members the topics of discussion.

However, not all members of the *sindicato* have equal representation. Those whose opinions and recommendations are most respected at the *sindicato* meetings (and those who are more likely to make these known), are those who have high levels of economic capital, and who have most successfully been able to convert that into cultural, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986). What this means, is that their level of land ownership has facilitated their incorporation into the reciprocal labour system and given them scope for commodity exchange, with the build up of social networking that this entails, and through the membership of the *sindicato* that land ownership enables, they have been able to accrue cultural capital through adopting leadership roles and acquiring knowledge and skills. Finally, through their participation in the *sindicato*, they have the opportunity to convert the economic capital (land), via social and cultural capital, into symbolic capital by adeptly representing themselves as concerned for the community, and as disinterested. 'We are going to work for the community!' newly elected *dirigentes* will invariably claim during their acceptance speech. It is thus a stock of capital, coupled with an ability to choose one's words cleverly and manipulate meanings, a skill learnt over time, that are the prerequisites for the respect that community members need in order to influence decision-making within the community (cf. Keane 1994:621). Those who are most likely to fulfil these prerequisites are men, not too old, not too young, and from established and respected families (cf. Spedding 1994:159).<sup>154</sup> I will demonstrate with some case studies.

Each year, elections are held and a new directive enters into office, meaning that all men must take their turn at leading the community in some way.<sup>155</sup> This provides young men, and a few women, with an opportunity to become acquainted with some of the political and administrative aspects of their country, and to gain leadership and communicational skills. Within the collective habitus of Yungas *campesinos* is a disposition toward the equivalence between positions in the division of labour and positions in the division between the sexes (Bourdieu 1977:87), meaning that women

---

<sup>154</sup> Spedding (1994:159) writes that 'the young or poor households often do not come to meetings, and attendance is made up of a majority of older households, whose rank of *sayañero* is unquestionable.'

<sup>155</sup> Spedding and Llanos (1999:53) write that the rotation of roles is less systematic in Yungas *sindicatos* than in other areas of the country.

usually only attend *sindicato* meetings in representation of an absent man (their husband, father or widower), and if they are elected to *sindicato* roles, often have difficulty fulfilling them as they must balance this role not only with agricultural tasks, but also with gender-specific family obligations such as cooking and looking after children. This year Aurelia has taken on one of the important syndical roles, to give her husband a rest, but says she finds it hard to juggle syndical and family commitments. A husband will not always support his wife's decision to accept a position, making it difficult for her to attend meetings if it means not being at home in time to cook the meal. When they do attend, many of the women sit on the floor in the doorway or outside so as to remain accessible for small children and to leave before the end of the meeting to prepare lunch. One woman explained in a meeting held by the *Defensoría del Pueblo*<sup>156</sup> to discuss the situation of women, that on accepting a position, she had become the subject of suspicion, her husband interrogating her when she returned home from a meeting, saying, 'Where have you been? What have you been doing?' She said:

Before accepting a position, the woman should think hard about what her husband is like, because a lot of the time they accept a role, and then there are problems at home, the husband won't let her go to meetings and so on, and they can't do anything.<sup>157</sup>

The fact that women are less likely to hold leadership positions in the *sindicato* means that they have less opportunity for accruing cultural capital and for converting capital into symbolic capital through performance. When they do speak up, having had less practice at the manipulation of words and meanings, they tend to do so in a much more direct tone than the men, who have had time to learn the art of clever diplomacy. In illustration, when concerns were raised in one community that parents were not sending their children to the local school, (a drop in student numbers could potentially lead to a withdrawal of the government-channelled teacher salary designated to the community), it was decided that a list would be made of those who were not sending their children to the school, and a meeting held in which these turn-coats would be asked to provide explanations.<sup>158</sup> When it was implied that a certain family were not sending their children to the school, a woman who was standing outside the door began to shout, 'You're wrong! I have

---

<sup>156</sup> The *Defensoría del Pueblo* (Defender of the People) is an organism of the State designated to represent the interests of those who experience abuse on the part of the State. Those appointed as *defensores del pueblo* work with human rights throughout the country and work to raise awareness of women's and children's rights. This meeting was held in a small community in the Yungas.

<sup>157</sup> During one meeting, a young woman had been voted in as *dirigente* and did not want the job. She protested that her husband was not present. Some people agreed, saying, 'Yes, women shouldn't be sworn in at meetings, their husband might not approve.' Someone said, 'Her husband is a good man, she won't have any problems.' The woman protested that she would not be able to take on the role as she needed to travel to La Paz and would therefore not be able to stay for the whole meeting, as is obligatory for *dirigentes*. This argument was rejected, and the woman sworn in against her will.

<sup>158</sup> Some of the reasons were put forward in the meeting: There was a belief among some, allegedly unfounded, that the school did not have Ministerial Resolution to be an official high school, meaning that the students' high school certificate would not be valid elsewhere. There was also a belief that the teaching was not of an adequate standard at the school. A *dirigente* said, 'It's because the parents are now worried about their children's education and that's why they send them elsewhere. This school is nothing but dancing. What are they going to learn?!' Another argument put forward was that people from other communities were retaliating against what they considered to have been a rigged football championship, and were therefore not sending their children to what was the nearest high school. It was decided that a meeting would be called with the teachers to encourage them to take their teaching more seriously. It was also suggested that it would be made obligatory for each family to send a certain number of children to the school, as was the case in another near-by community, where in some cases children had to travel from Chulumani to the community school to fulfil the obligations of their parents who owned coca fields in the community.

three children here!' Such direct and undiluted accusations are rarely heard in the meetings, and were not to be tolerated by the tired community, who afforded the woman no sympathy. 'Is that why you come in?' they demanded, suggesting that she either enter to participate in the meeting in the correct manner, or remain outside.<sup>159</sup>

In the same way, there is little patience for elderly people who are not able to express themselves well. With meetings today being held predominantly in *castellano*, this is the case for those who are more comfortable speaking Aymara. After a discussion concerning the tying up of animals in inappropriate places at one meeting, the young General Secretary turned to an elderly man seated in the front row and said, 'Don A, you're not going to tie your donkey up on the football field anymore, okay?' before repeating this in Aymara. When the old man began to protest, he was paid no attention.

Young people must prove their worthiness as members and leaders of the community, yet some have a greater initial amount of capital to work with and build upon. The young General Secretary quoted above struggles to validate himself against the more experienced members of the community. After having been accused of entering another man's coca field unsolicited, he explained to the assembled community that he had simply been doing his duty in assessing a piece of land that the man wished to have measured, and that when the owner had begun to shout at him and abuse him for doing so, he had replied, 'I'm not your *yocalla* (boy)<sup>160</sup> for you to be shouting at me like that. I may be younger than you, but you have no right to shout at me.' The young man had proven his strength of character and ability with words, and explained triumphantly to the community that he would not be signing the man's request to have his land measured. He was able to make this decision, however, because he came from an established family that was respected by at least certain factions within the community, because he had accrued social and cultural capital through his work practices and through attending *sindicato* meetings in the past, and because he now found he had a skilfulness in converting that to symbolic capital. On the other hand, the young woman who had been elected to the position of '*vinculo femenina*' ('feminine link'), sat at the edge of the *dirigentes*' table throughout the meeting, and said nothing. The habitus made it difficult for her, as a young woman, to speak out and work to accrue capital in the same way that the young man did, although she too may have come from a family well endowed with economic capital. The possibilities available to her for converting that into other forms of capital were not the same as those available to the young man.

---

<sup>159</sup> However, according to Spedding (1994:149-150), the women of accommodated and established households complement in the coca field the activities that the men from those same households are realising in the formal setting of the *sindicato*. It is the women who are in charge of maintaining the important relationships that allow their family to constantly dispose of an accessible labour force for their production needs. She writes, 'The formal activity of the agrarian *sindicato* shows itself as a fraction of the actual exercise of control, which is undertaken via informal systems, above all through the manipulation of public opinion in the process of work, the most important work being, in this case, the coca harvest' (Spedding 1994:149; cf. 1994:175).

<sup>160</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, the current sentiment surrounding the word *yocalla* has its legacy in the Spanish conquest, for those who worked on the *haciendas* were required to address the *hacendado* as *tata* (Sir or father), while an indigenous man of any age would be addressed by the term *yocalla*, the Aymara word for 'boy' (Heath 1973:80).



Those who form part of the coca *sindicatos* are established landowning families with a considerable stock of capital (Bourdieu 1986), and those who exercise most influence within the *sindicato* and therefore the community are the male, middle-aged members of those most successful families. They have most sway in the decision-making processes that occur within the community, and in the way the community is presented as a whole to the wider world. Development organisations will find the *sindicatos*, as entities representational of a community, the most effective mechanism in place through which to communicate with as wide a cross-section of the community as possible. It is, however, useful to know exactly whom one is communicating with or through.<sup>161</sup>

## **The Coca Trade: Exchange and Distribution of Coca and Ideas**

### **Social Networking in a Global Trade System**

Let us recall, from Chapter One, our aerial view of the world, with traffic (mules, then trucks, then buses) criss-crossing between Yungas towns and communities, then radiating outwards, down into the sweaty jungles and up onto the desertic *altiplano*, then from there on to Peru, Argentina, North America and Europe... If we zoom in closer, we see buses and trucks full to the brim and staggering drunkenly; women and men nursing tired-eyed children packed in among the oranges and mangoes and coca; everywhere, coca. Stopping and starting, loading up more coca at each town, coca to keep the nodding driver alert after twenty-four hours on the road, and all sleepers awakening to climb down in the rainy night and help haul the bus out of the boggy mud. This is the Yungas, a place that never stands still, a place epitomised by movement and travel. And as the coca, the oranges and the mangoes travel and are exchanged and distributed throughout the country and beyond, so information is exchanged, relationships formed and meanings created.

Wolf (1982:310) wrote that the market is not only a means for exchange of goods and services but also, citing Mintz (1959:20) a set of 'mechanisms of social articulation', and that with the advent of European expansion, and the ensuing development of a capitalist market of global magnitude that 'incorporated pre-existing networks of exchange and created new itineraries between continents' (Wolf 1982:352), those societies that did not move to participate in this worldwide movement of commodities, relinquished 'the capacity to reproduce their social networks and hierarchies' (ibid.:353). Perhaps trade patterns did not alter so much for the yungueños, who continued to supply traditional consumption markets that have existed since prior to the widespread rule of the Incas (Soux de Wayar n.d.:5), but certainly the structural changes that occurred with the

---

<sup>161</sup> In my work with NGO *Vida*, I found that the best way to communicate with the community about the development projects I was volunteering with was via the *sindicato* meetings, as it was a situation in which the largest possible representation of the community was present.

implementation and then the dismantling of the *hacienda* system could not be said to have been without repercussions for the social system that operated around these trade routes.<sup>162</sup>

Whereas, under *hacienda* rule, producers were restricted in terms of the level of commercial activity they were able to undertake (CIPCA 1976:27; Santamaria 1983:6), and had 'no direct access to regional or national institutions of education, government or commerce' (Heath 1973:79-80), after the Agrarian Reform, the way opened up for small-scale producers to become more involved in the market, and new avenues for social mobility and social differentiation resulted (CIPCA 1976:28; Spedding 2004:81; Knoerich 1969:10). This implies also new opportunities for social networking and communication. Through trade, personal relationships of mutual obligation are built up (Bourdieu 1986:249-50; Mauss 1990:7), such that 'behind the operation of supply and demand... there is a network of person-to-person dealings which persist over time and outlast any single transactions' (Mintz 1959:24). In this way, when I go to the market, my *casera* (shopkeeper with whom I have a special exchange relationship) will expect me to buy from her stall in exchange for the little bit extra she gives me as her *casera* or *caserita*, so that if I buy grapes from the woman across the way, I can be assured that Doña Rubina will not deign to speak to me for the rest of the day.

As Spedding (1994:99) writes, 'the sale of products is... the essential site of articulation between the peasantry and national and international society', and 'the path to success within the community is found through the wise use of exchange links' (ibid.:89). CIPCA (1976:38) attest that the whole social structure of the Yungas can be explained by inquiring as to the trade routes via which *campesino* products arrive at the markets of La Paz and abroad, 'providing at the same time a way of life to all the intermediary groups and assisting services.' They write:

Given that the whole social structure of the Yungas is based on the mechanisms to extract the typical agricultural products from the region, these (vertical) relations acquire a primordial importance.

(CIPCA 1976:38)

We might ask, as Keane does (1994:606, 623), what sorts of interactions might be taking place along these trade routes that are so important socially. He believes that changes such as an increased integration into commodity markets may have important effects not only economically, but also in terms of non-economic matters such as systems of signs, values and powers. Correspondingly, 'If the circulation of objects articulates with that of other signs, then our understanding of the effects of historical change in one must take into consideration change in the others' (ibid.:606). As coca and other goods travel along these trade routes and are passed from producer to intermediary to consumer, information is transferred, values and meanings are

---

<sup>162</sup> Coca was still transported via mule and donkey along pre-Columbian trails until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Soux de Wayar n.d.:5). These trails were used once again during the military dictatorship of General Luis García Meza in the 1980s, when the sale of coca was prohibited except to a government depot (*Acopio de Coca*). Government officials confiscated coca at any opportunity, allegedly to re-sell to narcotrafficking friends (Spedding 1997:119).

produced and social differentiation is enacted and confirmed (cf. Appadurai 1988; Marx 1952:31; Miller and Tilley 1996; Taussig 1980:25). Taking historical changes into account will lead us to ask what sorts of meanings and values are being produced in terms of the ethnic and class categories that are a hangover from *hacienda* days and that continue to persist within aspects of the coca trade (Rivera 1994:Chapter 3, p.2; Spedding 1994:144), and also what signs and symbols come into play when the government builds a military check-point along one of the main coca passage-ways, threatening what little, though significant in relative terms, commercial autonomy has been achieved for *campesinos* over the past decades.<sup>163</sup>

In the following, we will trace the coca leaf along its trade routes, from community to town to city and beyond, and in so doing, explore some of the communicative interaction that occurs at these levels. In mentioning 'vertical ties', CIPCA have given us a clue as to the fact that people take advantage of this system as best they can according to the land they possess, and the social networks and social capital they have at their disposal.

### Tracing Trade Lines of Communication and Social Differentiation

Carola and Benjamin have finally been able to invest in a small coca field, offered to them cheaply by a kind neighbour. They have harvested their field for the first time with the indispensable assistance of Warita and her little brothers, Warita letting her mother know, indignantly, that 'other children don't have to work.' (Carola laments, 'The children know their rights now. They have TV...') Now they must set about turning the leaf into disposable income. They have extracted from their small piece of land, half a *taki* (25 pounds) of coca, which is not enough to make a journey to the market in La Paz financially worthwhile. It is the established and wealthier Yungas families whose larger extensions of land and greater yields off-set the cost of the obligatory *carnet de productor* (producer's licence),<sup>164</sup> the taxes extracted by ADEPCOCA at the market in La Paz, and the cost of transport and daily expenses in the city, who are able to trade regularly and directly with the legal coca market in La Paz (cf. Rivera 1994:3; Spedding 2004:397).<sup>165</sup>

---

<sup>163</sup> Until 2006, Bolivian law stipulated that the State defined the routes and means of transport by which coca would be transported to legal markets (Congreso Nacional 1988), although this has been relaxed since Evo Morales gained power (cf. La Razón 2006b). Bolivian law also sanctions those who trade coca without a permit (Congreso Nacional 1988). See Chapter Two.

<sup>164</sup> In actual fact, all those who produce coca are required to possess one of these cards, but only those who transport their coca to La Paz themselves, and therefore pass government check-points, see the need to acquire one.

<sup>165</sup> Spedding's (2004:397) recent study has shown that producers must have at least two *takis* of coca to sell for the trip to La Paz to be profitable. If Carola were to make the journey from her community, it would entail first of all a two and a half hour trip to Chulumani, and from there, at least another five hours to La Paz. The journey is often fraught with the danger and at the very least, the relatively minor annoyance of landslides, and it is not unusual to have to wait hours or days on the road while the remnants of a landslide are cleared away, a crumbled road is repaired or an engine fixed. Many producers make the journey in the back of a truck as it is cheaper, and room for the coca cannot always be found on conventional buses. Instances in which *campesinos* have formed cooperative societies, through which they work together and sell their products as a group, aiming to achieve better prices for their products, are rare (CIPCA 1976:38), and even more rarely successful.



**FIGURE 15: Teamwork: Pulling the truck out of the mud on a Yungas road.** (Reproduced with permission from Cristian Mendoza, January 2005).



**FIGURE 16: Bogged.** (Photo by author, February 2004).





**FIGURE 17: Travelling in the Yungas.** (Photo by author, January 2004).

Those who cannot cover such costs, sell instead to a *rescatador*, or intermediary, either in the town, or in their own community (cf. Mintz 1959:27).<sup>166</sup> Marcos and Renata, the *rescatadores* who will buy Carola and Benjamin's coca, are from Chulumani and have been doing the rounds in the neighbouring communities with their young son, stocking up on coca to take to La Paz on Monday. On weekends, they use their mini-bus to ferry passengers between Chulumani and another nearby town, a busy and profitable route on market days. Already, a class division has become apparent and, bearing in mind our previous discussion, an ethnic one. CIPCA (1976:38) write that trading relationships are most often between lower class *campesinos* and upper or middle class (we can assume *mestizo*) *rescatadores*. Again, class and ethnic 'categories of thought' (Barnes 1954:45) persist as a vestige of the hacienda system, as although many *ex-hacendados* became *rescatadores* soon after the demise of the hacienda (Heath 1973:81), many of today's intermediaries are *campesinos* who took advantage of a rupture with the hacienda system to become socially mobile (Spedding 1994:119).<sup>167</sup>

This class division manifests itself today through an antagonism between *rescatadores* and producers, the latter considering the former to be 'parasites' who feed on the profit of the *campesinos* without having done any real work (Spedding 1997:128).<sup>168</sup> In several communities, intermediaries from outside the community have been prohibited from entering to buy coca, the reason being that they buy for a much lower price than they would receive in La Paz, and are therefore exploiting the producers (cf. Wolf 1982:354).<sup>169</sup> ADEPCOCA has attempted to eliminate capitalist traders, but Yungas *rescatadores* have been organised enough to foil such attempts (Colque and Spedding n.d.:Chapter 2, p2).<sup>170</sup>

Now, *rescatador* and small-scale producer sit on the ground outside the latter's rented adobe house, and no one draws breath as the coca is inspected before purchase. Unfortunately for Benjamin, his error in allowing the leaves to become blackened by forgetting to turn them as they dried in the sun does not go unnoticed by Don Marcos.<sup>171</sup> After noting the blackened leaves, which immediately lower their value, he goes on to tell Carola and Benjamin that coca prices are very low

---

<sup>166</sup> Mintz (1959:27) wrote that intermediaries played a 'central role in the articulation of the peasantry with other classes, and of different segments of the peasantry with each other.'

<sup>167</sup> Spedding (1997:124) writes that today, *rescatadores* are either 'capitalist' traders whose purpose is to accumulate capital which they will reinvest in more coca or in things such as transport and urban real estate, or *campesino* traders who work on a relatively small scale. The latter include the more affluent Yungas peasants, who combine the sale of their own produce with that of their family and neighbours in their community, as well as *campesino* traders from the *altiplano* who own some land in the Yungas and make regular trips between the Yungas and the *altiplano*, taking coca from the Yungas to sell in a continuation of the age-old exchange relation between the two areas.

<sup>168</sup> As I sat by the side of the road in Chulumani one night with three friends, a small truck went past overflowing with coca. 'That's \$1500/ \$2000 minimum', my friend said to me, and mused the possibility of getting into the business of coca trading, if only he had enough capital and a truck.

<sup>169</sup> Carola was matter-of-fact when she said, 'Some rob us as well', meaning that *rescatadores* tend to buy the coca for less than its worth.

<sup>170</sup> There has also been reluctance to issue producer's licences to some Yungas residents who own a small field but whose main activity is trade, as it is thought that, as capitalist traders, they should pay for the expensive commercial licences (Spedding 1997:126). A woman who might be considered of the town's lower classes, although her husband is a teacher in a community, and who had fairly recently decided to enter into the business of coca trading, told how she felt that the practice of obliging *rescatadores* to serve three days at a time at road blockades before returning home, instead of the two days that correspond to producers, was discriminatory.

<sup>171</sup> Drying coca is an art that requires much skill and experience, and it is important to know exactly when to lay the leaves out to dry, when to turn them and when to store them away. As a novice *cocalero*, Benjamin has yet to acquire these skills.



at the moment due to country-wide road blockades that are preventing buyers from reaching the coca market in La Paz. With sellers clamouring to get rid of their produce, he tells them, the cost of a *taki* has dropped suddenly from 600 to 400 bolivianos.<sup>172</sup> Carola and Benjamin accept the low offer, though they are told later by a neighbour that according to Radio Yungas, the prices in La Paz are not as low as Don Marcos had claimed.<sup>173</sup> Rivera has written:

...one of the issues involved in unequal exchange and in the (neo)colonial price differentials that emerge at different points in the 'life history' of indigenous commodities, consists in that trade imbalances involve differential access to knowledge from producer, to trader, to consumer.

(2005:30)

And so Carola and Benjamin, having relied upon Don Marcos for access to information originating in La Paz that would enable them to accumulate capital most favourably for themselves, are left behind in the community, lacking land, lacking labour capital, lacking social capital and cultural knowledge, as the *rescatadores* and wealthier *campesino* families make their way off along the trade lines of the communicative ecosystem. As they do so, they shift their position within the communicative ecosystem and access opens up to them for different types of social interactions and communication. On their way through town, Renata stops to *comadrear* (gossip) with Teresa and puts her name down for *pasanaco*<sup>174</sup>, the money-lending game played among townsfolk, while Marcos pays a visit to the Town Hall to discuss a development project that is underway in the community where he has his coca field.<sup>175</sup>

On Monday, they set off in their minibus to La Paz, David periodically peering out the window and shouting, 'It's still there, Mum!', remembering the time that thieves had stolen 1000bs worth of coca

---

<sup>172</sup> For most of my fieldwork, 1 boliviano equalled about 20c Australian and 12c U.S. The prices of a *taki* can fluctuate between 250 and 1000 bolivianos in a relatively short space of time, depending on various factors, and it is another dangerous game calculating when to harvest and when to sell, in order to maximise profits. Coca prices generally follow an annual cycle, with prices being lowest during the rainy season when the harvest is more abundant (from January to April) and highest during the dry season when the trees produce less (from July to October) (Spedding 2004:393). Annual *fiestas* may also affect the price. In October, producers often harvest their coca before it is strictly ready, so as to convert it into cash to be spent during the festivities of *Todos Santos* (All Saints) in November, and as such, the price drops. This is also a period of high demand because coca is used in the rituals associated with *Todos Santos*. Annual *fiestas*, such as that of Bolivia's day of independence on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August, may also contribute, since buyers from the *altiplano* do not travel to La Paz to buy coca, as they are busy participating in their hometown's street parades, which are often obligatory (ibid.:297; 1997:120-121). Other factors such as the political situation of the country (manifested in road blockades) can affect the price as travel is restricted, and, it is rumoured although not corroborated, so might government eradication efforts, as well as raids carried out on the leading figures of the drug trade.

<sup>173</sup> See Lagos (1994:108-109), who discusses the benefits that *rescatadores* in the Chapare find in trading in villages instead of at markets. In the villages, they have no scales (which may or may not be the case in the Yungas), and can establish more intimate relationships with the peasants because there is more time to sit and talk. This implies the cultivation of relationships of reciprocal obligation, such as that of *compadre* or *casera*. See pages 102 and 115.

<sup>174</sup> The rules of *pasanaco* are as follows: Ten financially reliable people are invited to play. Pieces of paper on which are written the numbers 1 to 10, representing the weeks in a ten week cycle, will then be placed in a box and each person is asked to pull out a piece of paper without looking. On your designated week, you will receive 100bs from each of the other nine participants, which you can put to work as an interest-free loan. On each of the other weeks, you must pay 100bs to the person whose designated week it is. The game functions as community-organised credit, and those who fail to keep up with their payments are not invited to play again.

<sup>175</sup> Saturdays and Sundays were the days when, in my role as volunteer for an NGO, I could expect to receive an early-morning knock on the door and some information from the communities about how the project was progressing or what unforeseen circumstances were holding up proceedings.

from the roof while the vehicle was still in motion. As vehicle owners though, they do not have the burden of dependence upon the *transportistas* (bus and truck drivers) for transport prices. This sector is accused, by those who rely upon them, of taking advantage of political and environmental situations (road blocks and landslides respectively) to raise the prices more than necessary. On one occasion when passengers were asked to augment their ticket price on account of a landslide, two young holiday-makers from the city encouraged people to pay the extra, saying, 'It's not the driver's fault. It's the fault of nature, we can't blame anybody.' To this, a local woman responded, 'You are from the city. Why do you speak? You don't know how it is,' to which one of the young girls protested, 'It doesn't matter if you're from the city or the country; we are all human. That is what matters.' Not being dependent on the whims of the *transportistas* for her business to function, the young girl was blind to the class antagonisms that exist between those who have economic capital in the form of a bus, are of a higher class and a different ethnicity, and those who are dependent on them precisely because they do not have access to such capital; the poorer *campesinos* and merchants from the town. Inadvertently, she had sided with the exploitative elite, in line with what was expected of one of her class and ethnicity.<sup>176</sup>

Upon arrival in La Paz, traders head straight to the *mercado de la coca* in Villa Fatima, the only market where Yungas coca can legally be sold, or to food markets to sell fruit, or set about stocking up on clothes or other food items for their stores in the town. During their time in La Paz, people take the opportunity to communicate with friends and family, or attempt to recover a debt.<sup>177</sup> It is in La Paz that Rubina receives news of her family, who live in a small community in the *altiplano*. It is here too that Don Marcos tracks down the office of the development organisation implementing a project in his community, and discusses vital information that he will then take back, along with a certain amount of symbolic capital for having undertaken such communication, to share at the next *sindicato* meeting. Those who do not make the trip themselves send information via a willing bus-driver who serves as post-man where the national postal system does not enter.<sup>178</sup>

The coca trail traces the connecting lines of a socially differentiated ecosystem of coca communications, as landowners and landless, *rescatadores* and producers, *campesinos* and *transportistas* have differential access to social networks and communicative social interaction. As

---

<sup>176</sup> It is not unusual, during the rainy season, for a landslide from above to cover the road, or for the soft unpaved road to fall away into the valley below. At the best of times, the road is only wide enough for one vehicle to pass. On this occasion, buses from the same company stranded on either side of the landslide agreed reluctantly to do a passenger exchange, meaning that the buses would turn around and return the way they had come. The drivers were perhaps annoyed that they would not be able to reach their planned destination, but as the two buses were from the same company, no money would be lost from this arrangement. Hence, the ire raised among passengers who were asked to add an extra 10bs (US\$1.25) to their ticket price (usually a total of 15bs [US\$1.90] but which had already been raised to 20bs before departure). They staged a revolt against the bus-driver and only agreed to pay when the driver stopped the bus, refusing to advance until the extra fees were paid. This sort of occurrence is not unusual and it is said that if too easily given in to, the *transportistas* 'se acostumbran' (get used to taking advantage of their passengers). See also Lagos (1994:103), who writes that in the Chapare, 'Merchants are able to establish an oligopolistic control over exchange and transport'.

<sup>177</sup> Some traders own or rent houses in La Paz, some stay with relatives or in the coca market, and those on the lowest budget, like my casera Rubina, sleep overnight in the truck they arrived in.

<sup>178</sup> As I left Carola and Benjamin's community one day, the mini-bus groaning under the weight of bags and bags of coca, the driver went over the things he had to remember. A list of things he had to buy for various people, messages to pass on and 'this 100Bs, who gave it to me?... Ah yes, it's for Jaime's son!' Today, with no postal service to the town, the only way for me to send correspondence to my friends and *ahijados* (godchildren) is to send it to my brother-in-law who lives in La Paz, who will then pass it on to a friend when she comes to sell coca each week at the *mercado de la coca*.

they move along the trail and shift their position within the communicative ecosystem, they are set apart and divided along lines of class and ethnicity, and as the coca leaf and other goods are exchanged and distributed, information is passed along and meanings created about those who inhabit this social system. Even among those who have made the journey to La Paz, there exist class antagonisms, Spedding (2004:287, 404) describing as an expression of opposition of class the *rescatadores*' claims that the fact that they wait longer for an optimum price serves to maintain a high price for coca in the interests of all yungueños, whilst the producers undo this by selling rapidly.<sup>179</sup>

In any case, once Don Marcos relinquishes Carola and Benjamin's carefully harvested (and not so carefully dried) coca, it is sold on in individual packets to shoppers in the markets of La Paz, or on to be fabricated into coca tea for city elites, or transported to somewhere on the *altiplano*, perhaps to the coca-hungry mines of Potosi. Or perhaps it clandestinely crosses the border into Northern Argentina where, despite the leaf being outlawed, many people chew it daily in the same way that their Bolivian neighbours just across the border do (cf. Rivera 2005:31-46).<sup>180</sup> Through its consumption in these locations, further social interaction takes place, and meanings are remade and created.

## Consumption as Social Interaction and the Communication of Meanings

'Akhulli!' is the welcome cry that signals that it is time to stop the harvest and rest beneath a *sikili* tree, sucking on coca leaves. *Akhulli* comes from the Aymara word *akhulliña* (*acullicar* or *bolear* ('to ball') in Bolivian Spanish), meaning to suck on or 'chew' coca.<sup>181</sup> *Akhulli* then, is a 'coca break,' in much the same way those in other parts of the globe might take 'tea', a 'coffee break' or a 'smoko'. In the same way too, the *akhulli* is often a time when social interaction takes place, contrasting with lunch-time, which in the Yungas is shared only with family members and not with the wider work group.<sup>182</sup> Catherine Allen (1988:127) is correct in asserting in her ethnography of Quechuan Peru, that coca 'provides a frame within which peaceful and constructive social interaction takes place.' In fact, the consumption of coca leaves serves both in terms of social connection between people

---

<sup>179</sup> *Rescatadores* are able to wait several days for the best buyer, because the large quantities of coca they transport will offset the costs of their stay in the city, and also because they are not foregoing valuable work days in the Yungas as are the producers, who must return with haste to their agricultural tasks (cf. Spedding 2004:287, 404).

<sup>180</sup> In her book launch for *Kawsachun Coca* (Spedding 2004), Alison Spedding told how, although each bag of coca that leaves the legal coca market in La Paz shows the name of its alleged destination, officials from the Bolivian government's Agency for the Control of Legal Coca (DIGECO, *Dirección General de Control de la Coca Legal*) would not allow the researchers of the book access to this information.

<sup>181</sup> Coca is not literally 'chewed'. The leaves are placed in the mouth one by one, after removing the veins of each leaf so as not to damage the inside of the mouth. They then remain as a ball inside the cheek, and the juices of the leaf are sucked on for as long as an hour before being spat out. Wrapping a small amount of *lejía*, a substance made from vegetal ashes, inside a leaf, helps to maximise the actions of the various alkaloids (cf. Hurtado 1995). The practice is also referred to by the verb *pijchar*. Similarities exist with the way lime is used when chewing betel nut in the Asia-Pacific region. See Laufer (1919).

<sup>182</sup> I discovered this on my first workday. Unable to keep up the pace of the other workers as they harvested, I was left behind and consequently unable to partake in the lively discussions and exchange of gossip that took place during work. Thinking I would catch up on some of the conversation over lunch, I was dismayed to find this to be a solitary and quiet occasion. It was not until the afternoon *akhulli* that I was able to become involved in the discussion, through the sharing of coca.

on a personal level, as asserted by historian Carlos Mamani in the opening quote of this chapter, and also as a communicator of meanings about the person engaged in consumption, for as Mintz (1985:185) wrote, one can 'become different by consuming differently'.

### **Coca as a Medium for Social Interaction and Communication**

Coca leaves act as a mild stimulant for workers, be they miners or truck drivers, mitigating tiredness and hunger in a similar way to coffee or tea. Its alkaloids and nutrients also give it invaluable medicinal properties that ward against head-aches, stomach-aches, altitude sickness, period pain, colds, fevers, epilepsy, fractures and inflammations, to name a few (cf. Carter and Mamani 1986:293-370). It is, however, much more than the sum total of its physical properties, and becomes endowed with meaning through the act of its consumption. According to Vincent Mosco (1996:72), communication is 'a social process of exchange whose product is the mark or embodiment of a social relationship.' The act of engaging in *akhulliku* is such a process, as through offering coca to another person and having that person accept, or simply through sharing the experience of coca consumption, meanings and values are exchanged and communicated, and a social relationship is brought into being or maintained.

Likewise, Keane (1994:621) is interested in the way in which a simultaneous exchange of words and things serves to renew and make concrete the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) of which people strive to form a part. While an *akhulli* may not involve an exchange of goods per se, as on a regular workday each individual is likely to carry his or her own bag of coca, participants are nonetheless undertaking a social exchange of words, or even of silence (de Zutter 1994:240-1), facilitated via the sharing of the *akhulli* experience.<sup>183</sup> Through this communicative practice, they acknowledge to each other their mutual positioning within this 'imagined community' (cf. Bourdieu 1986:250). In the same way, a rejection of the opportunity to participate in the communicative act of sharing coca is, in effect, to refuse communication or reject the possibility of inclusion within a group; as Allen (1988:132) writes, to 'deny human intercourse'.

In Yungas fields, people will share the experience of 'chewing' coca at given intervals throughout the day: before, during and after work. Of an evening, 'Vamos aquel lao a bolear' ('Let's go over there and chew coca'), is an invitation to embark upon a discussion that will travel long into the night and include every topic from the shortcomings of the country's leaders, to those of a jealous neighbour. Where a social contract is to be forged, such as that of *compadrazgo* for a baptism, coca is shared as a social mediator (cf. Bourdieu 1986:249-250; Keane 1994:621-622; Mauss 1990:5). Carter and Mamani write with reference to the small towns and villages of the Bolivian *altiplano*:

---

<sup>183</sup> There are also situations in which all will be invited to share from the same bag of coca. During a *faena*, the owner might offer coca to the workers. During meetings and festive occasions, coca may be passed around for all those who wish to take it.

Coca is an indispensable good which makes possible good manners, the asking of a favour, a business deal within the community and even the initiation of a casual conversation on the road. It softens basic social relations in the same way that cigarettes or whisky do in modern urban society... it helps to reestablish harmony in conflictive situations; it is useful in courtesy visits, in the transfer of power and in all types of rituals that legitimate the structure of rural society.

(1986:241)

Coca also facilitates communication beyond the world of the living, as I discovered during my first foray into the Yungas to attend a *cabo de año*, the celebration held one year after a person's death. As the guests, seated around a courtyard, were being offered coca and cigarettes, I asked the elderly woman sitting next to me, 'Is the coca for anything special in this instance?' She replied, 'No, it's just to send off the Señora, and to have one last communion with her'.<sup>184</sup> Likewise, during *Todos Santos* (All Saints, or 'Day of the Dead'), families who have experienced a death in recent years erect a shrine (*mesa*) in their house and offer coca, beer and cigarettes to those who arrive to pray for the deceased. The guests sit together *pijchando* ('chewing' coca) and praying for the deceased person.<sup>185</sup> Coca is present at all such ritual celebrations.

Coca is also a mediator for communication with the unknown: with other times and places. A person who knows the art of coca divination (a *yatiri*) is able to read the way the leaves fall and the marks upon them, and thereby determine the cause of a person's illness, discover who has bewitched the person, or locate a stolen item and name the thief.<sup>186</sup> It can also cure the spirit, as Germán tells me. 'If someone is sad, you arrange candles and so on and a rosario, and the next day the person is happy. A doctor can't do that. Coca is medicine.' As it has been said, social relations are constituted materially, so that 'artefacts are implicated in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social identities' (Miller and Tilley 1996:5). Coca, through everyday social interaction, through the forging of social contracts and through ritual mediations with other times, places and worlds, is a mediator for social communication. As such, it becomes endowed with cultural meaning, so that its consumption becomes a statement about the consumer's social, class and ethnic positioning.<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> During this first part of the *cabo de año*, which follows a Catholic Church service, the mourning family of the deceased are dressed in black and pray to a shrine dedicated to the deceased. At a certain point in the evening, the mourners disappear to get changed into brightly coloured clothes, after which they line up to dance a traditional *cueca* and are given alcoholic drinks to skull. This rupture symbolises the farewelling of the family member and the end of mourning.

<sup>185</sup> Little children and the poor elderly enjoy this day, as they receive bread and *t'ant'a wawas* ('bread babies'; special baby-shaped bread made for this occasion) in return for praying at each table.

<sup>186</sup> See Carter and Mamani (1986:371-434) for details on coca divination, as well as Spedding (1994:114) and Arnold et al. (1992:159-160).

<sup>187</sup> Comparable and similar examples of the ways in which social relations are mediated and maintained through material goods can be found in qat chewing in Africa and the Middle-East, and betel nut chewing in the Asia Pacific region. See Weir (1985) and Varisco (1986; 1988) on qat, and Hirsch (1990) and Katz and White (1997) on betel. See also Laufer's (1919) query as to the similarities between the use of lime with both coca and betel nut.

## Coca as a Communicator of Social Differentiation

Mintz (1985:185) used the example of sugar to show how practices of consumption could be attached to social meaning. He wrote, '...consumption must be explained in terms of what people did and thought; sugar penetrated social behaviour and, in being put to new uses and taking on new meanings, was transformed from curiosity and luxury into commonplace necessity' (ibid.:xxix). Meanings, he wrote, rather than inhering in substances naturally or inevitably, arise out of use, as people put these substances or commodities to use in social relationships (ibid.). This could not be more true than in the case of coca, as through its consumption, meanings and values are produced that speak about its consumers, about their history and their identity. At the same time, a person's decision to consume coca, and the way in which they consume it, tells a story about the ethnic and class 'categories of thought' to which that person belongs or wishes to belong. Spedding describes the most basic dual division between *indio* and *blanco*, thus:

The Indian resides in a scattered population, lives from agriculture and cattle raising, carries bundles on his back, speaks a native language and chews coca... A Spanish person resides in the town, has a non-manual job..., has his bundles carried on the backs of others, speaks *castellano* and never chews coca.

(1994:129-130)

While there are townfolk who do chew coca, those who aspire to a middle-class lifestyle akin to those who live in the city will refrain from engaging in this practice, although they will not be averse to brewing a coca tea in the event that an ailment (of almost any kind) needs to be cured. Likewise, middle and upper class Bolivians in the city see coca chewing as a domain strictly reserved for indigenous people, but they too recognise it as an important medicinal commodity, and commercialised coca tea bags are an obligatory item on any well-to-do kitchen shelf. In this way, through differential consumption practices, people define themselves according to class and ethnicity (Mintz 1985).<sup>188</sup>

Mintz (ibid.:xxx) has pointed to the importance of history in understanding how such meanings come about. He writes, 'Human beings do create social structures, and do endow events with meaning; but these structures and meanings have historical origins that shape, limit, and help to explain such creativity', and 'In understanding the relationship between commodity and person, we unearth anew the history of ourselves' (ibid.:214). In attempting to reach such understandings, we will come to note that the cultural division that assigns the practice of coca chewing singly to the indigenous population has its origins in the Spanish conquest, when the newcomers marvelled over this strange habit of the 'Indians' (Cieza de Leon in Martindale 1886:2; Vespucci 1926:17-18; cf.

---

<sup>188</sup> See Rivera (2005:42-44) who describes the contrasting situation in the north of Argentina, where coca 'chewing' is much more normalised among all sectors of society. Possibly, this may be due to the fact that, not having a tradition of coca production, they do not have to overcome the historical distinctions between lower-class indigenous coca producer-consumer and higher-class non-indigenous non-producer-consumer.



Allen 1988:221; See Chapter Two).<sup>189</sup> The debates that ensued since that time over the positive or detrimental effects of chewing the leaf were in fact discussions about the indigenous populations of coca consuming countries.<sup>190</sup> And so, the practice of coca chewing has come to make sense according to the cultural habitus of indigenous Bolivians and, as a result of historical circumstances, has further become a consciously employed marker of indigenous identity.

'It is a product of our ancestors', and 'it was cultivated and utilised by the Afros, Aymaras and Quechuas', Afro-yungueños said of the coca leaf at a seminar in Chulumani.<sup>191</sup> Of course, groups tend to articulate that which unites them more succinctly when presented with a 'common foe' (Featherstone 1995:110, 112), so that much of the discourse that coca consumers produce about its ties to indigeneity is presented in terms of that which threatens coca and those who consume it. In this way, one *dirigente* speaking on Radio Yungas said, 'The first task of the United States is to destabilise the *cocaleros*. We have no choice but to defend the coca leaf because it is a part of our identity.' And when *campesinos* surrounded Radio Yungas in October 2003, fearing that it would be shut down by the government, they engaged in *akhulliku*, because it kept them awake, because it enabled them to forge a social bond with the other protesters, and at the same time because it enabled them to express to outsiders who they were and what their protest meant (cf. Spedding 1997:135).<sup>192</sup> 'They stood guard for two nights, with their *boleo*', said one of the town-dwelling radio staff members, both conveying and reproducing the symbolism involved. *They* had their *boleo*, and were therefore innately *campesino* and indigenous, protecting *their* radio.

A rejection of the opportunity to participate in the communicative act of sharing coca then, is not only a denial of human intercourse (Allen 1988:132), but also a rejection of a culture. When a delegation from one of the NGOs working in the area had been presented with a bag of coca as a demonstration of the local people's appreciation and hospitality, they had purportedly taken only the empty bag leaving its contents behind, and uttering the words, 'We don't want anything to do with coca. It's bad.' Whether or not these words were actually spoken is irrelevant, for the act of refusing the coca had spoken these words and much more.<sup>193</sup>

The fact, however, that such a statement as to the value of coca would be vehemently countered, rather than incorporated into the dominant discourse of the Yungas, might be, as Mintz (1985:xxix)

---

<sup>189</sup> Allen (1988:221) writes that it was out of the historical situation of the Spanish conquest, 'that the cultural identity of the Runakuna (Quechuan Peruvians with whom she undertook fieldwork) took shape, and that coca use came to signify Indianness.' She wrote that it is possible to view the runakuna as 'a cultural product of a historical dialectic of oppression and resistance' (ibid.).

<sup>190</sup> Carter (1996) has compiled a collection of essays discussing the physical and psychological effects of coca chewing on users. See Cáceres (n.d.; 1986; 2005) and other articles from Instituto Indigenista Interamericano (1986), Hanna and Hornick (1977), Laserna (n.d.), Lema (1997), Martindale (1886:49-5), Mortimer (1901) and Scott (1979) on this topic.

<sup>191</sup> In fact, this seminar was a Pre-Dialogue specifically for Afro-Bolivianos, although non-Afros also attended. Throughout this discussion I have referred only to indigenous Bolivians, but Afro-yungueños share the labour and class categories of Aymara Yungueños, and also partake in the practice of chewing coca.

<sup>192</sup> *Akhullikus* (group coca chewing sessions) are also staged as a form of public protest, and *campesinos* chew coca publicly, 'asserting the use of the leaf as a cultural symbol in opposition to middle-class racist prejudice against Andean culture' (Spedding 1997:135; cf. 1994:230-232).

<sup>193</sup> Important visitors to the Yungas may be presented with a coca wreath to hang around their necks; a gesture of hospitality and welcome, and also an act of making public the assumption that the visitor is in favour of coca. The welcome and hospitality, of course, is contingent upon this assumption being correct.

suspects, because 'the power to bestow meaning always accompanies the power to determine availabilities.' Yungas coca growers are both producers and consumers of the coca leaf, and in possessing a certain amount of control over production and trade practices, as well as an economic and a coca surplus, they also possess control over consumption practices and over the meanings they are able to create via their consumption. 'The relationship between production and consumption may even be paralleled by the relationship between use and meaning' (ibid.). So it is interesting to note that during the cocaine boom, when the government *Acopio de Coca* was dominating trade, traditional coca consumers in the *altiplano* were unable to source or afford coca for their traditional consumption (Allen 1988:224; Spedding 1997:119).<sup>194</sup> Where control over the mode of material production is diminished, so is control over the mode of cultural or social production. Where producers enjoy greater autonomy within the system, so too do they move with greater, although always relative, freedom throughout the communicative ecosystem, consuming and producing coca, values, meanings and discourse.

## Conclusion

A closer look at the relationship networks involved in the production, distribution, exchange and consumption practices of the coca leaf, has allowed us to see that this system lays the basis for a social and communicative system in the Yungas, which I have termed the 'ecosystem of coca communications'. To begin with, ethnicity and class as 'categories of thought' (Barnes 1954:45) that correlate to the labour activities of those being categorised are a legacy of the division of labour existent during the time of the *haciendas*, where indigenous people and Africans were lower class producers and consumers of the leaf, and *mestizos* and *blancos* were middle and upper class merchants, landowners and exporters (Soux de Wayar n.d.:2-3). Today, these categorisations manifest themselves most notably in a *pueblo-campo* dichotomy whereby those who reside in the *campo* are indigenous, lower class coca producers and consumers (through coca chewing), while townfolk are non-indigenous middle or upper class non-producers who do not consume in the traditional (indigenous) way.

While social differentiation does not manifest itself so explicitly *within* the different categories because of a habitus (Bourdieu 1984; 1990) shared by those who consider themselves to belong or aspire to belong to a particular class or ethnic category, it nonetheless occurs and is dependent upon the amount of land a person or family owns, and the amount of social capital or social networks they have access to. Those who lack land are considered poor because they lack economic capital, and with this the possibility to accumulate capital of the other types. They do not have the capacity to enter into the reciprocal work arrangements that signify inclusion in and

---

<sup>194</sup> Of course, coca growers continue to be dependent upon price fluctuations beyond their control, that are the result of occurrences beyond the country's borders, and are subject to restrictions from the government, but they do experience more autonomy now in terms of deciding at which price to sell, than when all sales were undertaken through the government.

successful integration into a community, or to participate in beneficial commodity exchange. Labour exchange also falls outside the capabilities of those people or families who do not possess available labour within the family (cf. Keane 1994:612), and who do not have carefully nurtured relationships and social networks from beyond the immediate family, which they can put to use in the form of labour (cf. Bourdieu 1986; Mauss 1990).

Those established Yungas families who possess the greatest amount of land and social capital are those who are most effectively able to utilise their and others' labour to achieve a favourable social and economic position for themselves, and at the same time who have the best access to the communicative mechanisms that are facilitated through labour exchange. It is also they who occupy positions of authority in the local *sindicato* and are best able to work toward their individual goals through this communicative forum, at the same time as they work to present to outsiders an image of a united community free from the ills of divisional self-interest (Barnes 1954:50). Finally, it is the well-established, landed *campesino* ('indigenous') families with strong social networks, and the middle-class ('*mestizo*') *rescatadores* and merchants from the town, who have the capital to follow the lines of the coca trade to shift their position within the communicative ecosystem, thereby gaining access to differential communicative and social networking mechanisms.

These families, through the economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital that they possess and accumulate, are best able to contribute to the 'assembling, dismantling and reassembling' of cultural products in the form of ideas, meanings and social practice (Wolf 1982). Such a capacity can be attributed, in part, to the control that they have over the means of coca production, manifested most succinctly in the meanings that are expressly attributed to the coca leaf and the act of consuming it in certain ways (Mintz 1985). Coca becomes both a social mediator, and a communicator of nascent and constantly morphing social facts that speak about ethnicity, class and power. It is also the one commodity upon whose production and consumption an entire communicative ecosystem is based, and which is able to unite disparate social groups as an imagined community (Anderson 1983) of 'yungueños' when adversity rears its head.

Now the morning has turned into day and the day into evening. The disco switches on its coloured lights and fills the plaza with the latest *cumbya* music, enticing young girls and boys and distressing their anxious parents. Karaoke enthusiasts are gearing up for a night of crooning, while more homely eyes are glued to the latest Mexican soap opera. The young boy who visited Doña Teresa's store has presented his mother with the plastic and the change, been scolded for having been overcharged, played with the other young children in the plaza and fallen asleep on his mother's lap in the back of the truck on the long journey home. Lizet, half an hour by truck and half a world away is bouncing her baby on her knee outside on the veranda of her adobe home beneath the dim light of an electric bulb. The voice of the radio presenter rings out into the still, balmy night, recapping the day's adventures, and her mother, next to her, chews coca and worries for her son in the wayward town.

#### 4 ICTs AS SOCIAL ARTICULATORS IN THE ECOSYSTEM OF COCA COMMUNICATIONS AND BEYOND: INCLUSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS



**FIGURE 18:** Stopping briefly to foreground the television in a Yungas community home. (Photo by author, June 2005).

It used to be with chasquis.<sup>195</sup> Now it's with radio. Walkie-Talkies. Until the 1980s, Walkie-Talkies were prohibited, because of Che and so on... My children use the telephone. As for me, I like letters. I send it by bus, or with another person. I have a brother in Argentina. We have lost contact now, but we communicated via letter for years. It's been fifty years since I've seen him. Twenty years since we've had no contact. Between '56 and '60 they checked the letters. They arrived censored. Letters are the best way. The letter is forever; it's a document. The telephone is for just a second, and then it's lost. I try to tell my sons – they don't understand. Roger, my son, wrote me a letter from La Paz, but he didn't put the date, the place, nothing. How could he write a letter without the date! I'll tell him off when he gets here; he'll get a caning.

( Raúl, Chulumani, 72 years)

Livelihood is never 'just' a matter of finding or making shelter, transacting Money and getting food to put on the family table or to exchange in the market place. It is equally a matter of ownership and circulation of information, the management of skills and relationships, and the affirmation of personal significance and group identity. The tasks of meeting obligations, of securing identity and status and organising time are as crucial to livelihood as bread and shelter.

(Wallman et al. 1982:5)

---

<sup>195</sup> *Chasquis* were people employed to run to deliver a message along trails criss-crossing the Andes. This form of communication dates to at least the time of the Incas.

## Introduction

'Harvest with care, the coca is in its price!' warns the radio, cutting across the banter and the flirtatious jibing that lay the foundations of the soundscape<sup>196</sup> of the coca field, at least until later in the afternoon when all are too tired and hot to speak and the sounds of *cumbya* music dedicated to 'la cholita Rufina' or 'Eduardo, te quiero' take over. When Amalia from the butchers in Chulumani begins shouting on the radio, hysterical, that she wishes it to be known that her mother-in-law has beaten her, the women's attention is drawn at once and in one fell swoop, Amalia is condemned. 'If her husband's there with her, he'll be beating her up right now,' says Lizet. 'How could she go and talk on the radio like that?' and then the conversation moves on to similar atrocities and Amalia is forgotten, until later that evening when she is spotted in the market, not even a black eye.

Lizet is taking her baby to the dentist in town and, after the minibus ride and a brief phone call to her aunt in La Paz about some money owed, she stops to buy some sardines from Doña Carmen. She lingers to watch the nice little poor girl Andrea playing hard to get with wealthy Jorge on the television, and Doña Carmen tells her, 'The blockade's been moved forward to Monday now. Roger was at the meeting.' 'They told us Wednesday,' says Lizet. 'They'll tell us on the radio,' and she shows Doña Carmen her baby's rotting tooth. 'Brush her teeth every day, with toothpaste,' says Doña Carmen, 'That's what they told us at *Creceer*<sup>197</sup>, in the health workshop'. Doña Carmen waits to see Lizet moving off down the street before informing Doña Lupe next door of the rotting tooth and the Wednesday blockade. 'Da pena,' she says, 'What a shame. No husband.' And so the day goes on; Andrea gives in to Jorge, Carla to Roberto, and Angela murders her grandmother before the night is over and the women can rest.

People make use of a combination of communications media including face-to-face communication (gossip, meetings, seminars and courses), telephone, television, print media, radio and the Internet, to achieve their aims of maintaining social relationships with friends and family, and accessing information not available to them via interpersonal relationships. In recognition of the interconnected and interdependent nature of the media that are employed to facilitate people's daily social exchanges, development scholars and practitioners have of late stressed the need to view information and communication technology (ICT) initiatives not as isolated projects, but as forming one part of an integrated communicative whole, or 'communicative ecology' (Tacchi et al. 2003a; Slater and Tacchi 2004; Tacchi 2006; cf. Tufte 2001b; 2006b).<sup>198</sup> Tacchi et al. have justified their use of the concept of a communicative ecology in this way:

---

<sup>196</sup> See Schafer (1977), Feld (1990), Westerkamp (1994), Corbin (1998) and Tacchi (1998; 2000; 2002a) on the concept of soundscape as a way of describing and interpreting our aural worlds. See page 32.

<sup>197</sup> An NGO that runs a micro-credit scheme in conjunction with health-oriented courses and financial education for women.

<sup>198</sup> Nair et al. (2006) and Horst and Miller (2006) have also employed the use of this concept in work for UNESCO and DfID respectively, the latter an anthropological study concerned specifically with mobile telephones. Tufte has also made the point that media or media texts must not be treated as isolated phenomena, but 'must be understood in the context of other texts in the media and in society' (2001b:29).



If you are studying the ecology of a forest or desert, you do not look at one or two animals or plants in isolation. You study how animals, plants, soil, climate and so on are interrelated, and may have impacts on things simultaneously. The same applies to communications and information: there are many different people, media, activities, and relationships involved.

(2003a:15)

Nair et al. (2006) take the term to mean 'the entire field of communicative linkages and connections within a given community' (Nair et al. 2006:5), including both technological and social linkages that are nonetheless 'fundamentally intertwined and interdependent' (ibid.:79).<sup>199</sup> It has been recognised that an ICT initiative is most likely to result in positive outcomes for local people where it looks to 'combine different media and link them to already established local social networks' (Slater and Tacchi 2004:1; cf. CRIS Bolivia 2003:39; DfID 2005; Gumucio-Dagron 2003:3; 2004a; Tufte 2001b). Tufte (2006b:719) writes that it is essential to recognise 'contexts and communication environments', and calls for an improved analysis of the broader communication environment in which communications initiatives operate. He writes:

There is far too strong a drive to flag the impact of single interventions, instead of understanding the broader contexts, the multiple mediators and the complex synergies that social communication spurs.

(Tufte 2006b:719)

As discussed in Chapter Three, there is a social and communicational structure in place within the Yungas that is inextricably intertwined with the coca production system. Social interaction takes place and cultural meanings and discourses are created according to a system that differentiates through land ownership, capacity for labour exchange (dependent upon social capital and social networking capacities), involvement within a local *sindicato*, participation in trade, and consumption practices. The coming-together of power struggles over both material and cultural resources can be expressed through the concept of the coca *field* (Bourdieu 1993; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), where individuals and groups are variously positioned according to the capital that they possess and the nature of their habitus (Bourdieu 1984) in a social system that revolves around the production and exchange of the coca leaf. As a vestige of the social relations existent during the colonial and *hacienda* periods (cf. Rivera 1994; Spedding 1994), habitus and capital differentiate people along class and ethnic 'thought' lines (Barnes 1954:45) that manifest themselves most succinctly in the binary division between agriculturalists and non-agriculturalists; *campesinos*/ lower class and *blancos* and *mestizos*/ upper and middle classes (See Chapter Two).

---

<sup>199</sup> Nair et al. (2006:3) write about 'local information networks' which they take to be 'a living field of social connections and communicative interactions that occurs with specific settings'.

It is into this entrenched system that any new ICT initiative must enter. Positionings within the coca *field* have consequences for the types of social interaction and communicational exchange in which people are able to take part, through both old and new media. This suggests that a political economy approach that recognises the power networks of inclusions and exclusions, both material and cultural, that are the result of historical and more recent circumstances and which are founded upon social practices of production and exchange, will enhance the use of the concept of communicative ecology (cf. Garnham 2006; Durham and Kellner 2006; Mosco 1996). As well as recognising that an ICT project cannot be treated in isolation, but is one organism within a complex ecosystem (Slater and Tacchi 2004; Tacchi 2006; Tacchi et al. 2003a), it is important also to recognise that this ecosystem is a part of a social system founded upon unequal social relations, interactions based upon dependence, need and strategy, and the need to address historical grievances, to which the organisation implementing the ICT project has, if only in the contemporary imagination and however unwittingly, contributed (cf. du Toit et al. 2007).

This chapter aims to paint a broad picture of the entire ecosystem of coca communications, illustrating the ways in which media availability and access is dependent in large part on positioning within the coca *field* (Bourdieu 1986). People make use of a combination of media to do any of three things, which the chapter will deal with in turn. Firstly, people look to communicate with those who form a part of their existing social networks, so that the different communications media that form a part of the ecosystem of coca communications serve as parallel extensions to face-to-face contact where this is no longer possible due to migration and travel (cf. McLuhan 1964; Skuse and Cousins 2007).<sup>200</sup> In this way, the technological, social and discursive cannot be separated into layers, as Hearn and Foth (2007a:1) would have it (see Chapter One), but form a continuous whole: an integrated ecology of coca communications (cf. Nair et al. 2006).

Secondly, people use available technological and social resources to tap into informational networks existing beyond a geographical locality in which face-to-face interpersonal social interaction is possible. When technological devices and media are used to transfer information on a large scale and across large geographical distances, we can trace a communicative or discursive flow from a Yungas coca field, to a radio station in Chulumani, to a radio station in La Paz, to a news agency in New York, to a battle field in Iraq or a UN conference in Vienna, and from there it goes on, illustrating the interconnectedness of the global communicative ecosystem of which the ecosystem of coca communications is but a subsystem (cf. Appadurai 1996:41).

Finally, a select group make strategic use of communications media as they become engaged in a struggle for control over cultural production. It is to this that I will dedicate the final section of the chapter. ICTs can become a site of struggle for the creation of discourses and identities: a struggle

---

<sup>200</sup> McLuhan (1964), a trailblazer in communications theory in the 1960s, wrote that media were 'an extension of ourselves' (ibid.:7). He wrote that the medium itself was more important than the content in terms of the consequences it had on individuals and society, and equated communications media to natural resources, stating that 'Cotton and oil, like radio and TV, become "fixed charges" on the entire psychic life of the community. And this pervasive fact creates the unique cultural flavour of any society' (ibid.:21). See Hirst and Harrison (2007:53-5) for a critique of his work.

that is seen in the case at hand as a continuation of the history of unequal power relations that has characterised Yungueño people's relationships with outsiders. Coca growers inhabiting certain positions make use of the relative autonomy they have in terms of the coca trade to dominate certain media spaces and thereby to contribute most heavily to the creation of discourse and meaning in those areas. It is here too, that development organisations considering working with communications initiatives need to be mindful of the place that they occupy in the historical political economy, as perceived in the contemporary Yungas imagination.

### **The Nature of the Media: Properties and Function for Different Users**

Altheide (1994:674) hints at the practical importance of the nature of different communications media (in particular computer-mediated information technologies), when he writes, 'Formats of communication are consequential if they inform the process of defining, limiting, directing, and legitimizing human conduct' (cf. Spitulnik 2002:338). The particular characteristics of the different media that form a part of the ecosystem of coca communications have implications for their potential functionality and their accessibility to people from different positions within the coca *field*. Hence, I will briefly outline the properties of each of the most important media, before moving on to some case studies of how they are utilised in the Yungas.

As depicted in the table on pages 136-137, I use six characteristics by which to classify the different media, which include face-to-face communication, radio, telephone, television, print media (newspapers and leaflets), Internet, and NGO-run courses (agricultural extension courses, Internet courses, and so on, which are a form of face-to-face communication, but for our purposes, a separate category). The first three characteristics have implications for access, and are as follows:

- 1) Spatial positioning requirements
- 2) Communicative or sensory requirements
- 3) Economic capital requirements

The first refers to whether a person must travel to a particular location to use the medium, or whether the medium is portable, making geographical location irrelevant. Aside from face-to-face communication, which is embodied, meaning that the spatial positioning needing to be achieved depends on the location of the person with whom one wishes to communicate, radio is the medium least stringent in its spatial positioning requirements. It is portable and can be taken wherever the listener-communicator needs to go (cf. Crisell 1986:215; Spitulink 2002:339). While a newspaper is also portable, this medium is not available to be bought outside of the town, so spatial positioning becomes an issue for access (cf. Beltrán 2006a:81). Likewise, NGO-run educational or extension courses could potentially be held in any of the communities, but the likelihood is that most

participants will need to travel to attend them. Neither the telephone, television nor Internet are portable, meaning that in order to use them, one must travel to where they are.<sup>201</sup>

The second characteristic, sensory requirements, refers to the type of communicative or sensory activity demanded of the communicator, whether oral, aural or visual, and whether spoken or written. This, coupled with the spatial positioning requirements already discussed, has implications for whether or not the medium must continually be foregrounded (made the focus of a situation and paid direct attention), or if it is able to be backgrounded, meaning that it can continue to function as a communicative medium at the same time that the listener-viewer-communicator carries out additional activities or tasks (Crisell 1986:209; Spitulnik 2002:342-3; Tacchi 1998:27). This, in turn, has implications for which groups of people are able to access which media.

The two written media, print and Internet, naturally exclude those who are illiterate, with the Internet further excluding those who do not have or are unable or unwilling to acquire computing skills (cf. Kellner 2002). Further than this, frequent or continuous access is restricted by virtue of the fact that, whilst one is reading, one cannot undertake certain other activities. Both must be foregrounded; the Internet more so, due to portability, than the newspaper, which might be read whilst tending to a shop, but not whilst harvesting coca. Coupled with the fact that these media are situated in a specific locality (the Internet is situated in town, the newspaper must be bought in town), the result is a crude division between agriculturalists, who do not access these media frequently if at all, and non-agriculturalists, who are somewhat more likely to (cf. Gigler 2001:37; Rice 2002:106; Skuse and Cousins 2007:188).

The telephone (oral/aural) and the television (visual/aural), while serving entirely different functions, have in common that they too must be foregrounded, the first because of its non-portability (anchored in a small, barren phone booth) and the nature of a telephone call as a task to be begun and completed within a compressed period of time (cf. Horst and Miller 2006; Skuse and Cousins 2007), and the second because of its non-portability and the fact that it requires visual attention, ruling out coca harvesting, walking along the road, bathing the children outside, but not tending to the shop; again, an agriculturalist-non-agriculturalist dichotomy of access arises. Those media which can be backgrounded are radio, and sometimes face-to-face communication, if we are to stretch the meaning of face-to-face to include the banter that occurs in the coca field, and the conversations that one may or may not be an active or central part of at any particular time (Crisell 1986:209; Spitulnik 2002:342-3; Tacchi 1998:27). Radio and face-to-face communication then, become the media most accessible to agriculturalists.

The third characteristic is economic capital requirements, and we can look at this in terms of immediate investments to be made, or in terms of the deeper obstacles to access that may result

---

<sup>201</sup> At the time of my fieldwork, there was no mobile phone access in the Yungas. This changed when a mobile phone tower was installed in March 2006. Televisions are of course portable, but not in a way that permits day-to-day mobility.

Communications Medium	Properties of Medium						Function	User
	Implications for Access			Implications for Type of Communication, Relevance and Ownership				
	Spatial Positioning requirements	Communicative or Sensory requirements	Economic capital requirements	Direction of information flow	Broadcast or narrowcast (impersonal/ interpersonal)	Immediacy of message transition		
Face-to-face	Embodied	Oral/ aural/ visual	No immediate economic cost	Dialogic	Narrowcast (interpersonal)	Immediate	Maintain and extend social networks (emotion, livelthood)	1. Agriculturalists 2. Non-agriculturalists
		Foreground or background						
Radio	Portable	Oral/aural	No immediate economic cost for listening, but may require a charge for participation	Dialogic In-coming (from national/ international sources)	Broadcast and 'false narrowcast' (impersonal and interpersonal)	Immediate or time-delayed	Maintain and extend social networks (emotion, livelthood) Access information from beyond existing social networks	1. Agriculturalists 2. Non-agriculturalists
		Foreground or background						
Telephone	Non-portable	Oral/aural	Immediate economic cost	Dialogic	Narrowcast (Interpersonal)	Immediate	Maintain and extend social networks (emotion, livelthood)	1. Non-agriculturalists 2. Agriculturalists
		Foreground						
Television	Non-portable	Visual/ aural	No immediate economic cost, but requires capital	Non-dialogic, in-coming (from national/ international sources) <sup>1</sup>	Broadcast (Impersonal)	Immediate or time-delayed	Access information from beyond existing social networks	1. Non-agriculturalists 2. Agriculturalists
		Foreground (rarely background)						

Print	Potentially portable but accessed from certain locations	Visual, written (requires literacy)	Immediate economic cost	Non-dialogic, in-coming (from national/inter national sources)	Broadcast (Impersonal)	Time-delayed	Access information from beyond existing social networks	1. Non-agriculturalists 2. Agriculturalists
	Foreground							
Internet	Non-portable	Visual, written (requires literacy and computing skills)	Immediate economic cost	Dialogic and in-coming (from national and international sources)	Broadcast or narrowcast (Impersonal and interpersonal)	Immediate ('chat') or time-delayed (email)	Maintain and extend social networks (emotion)  Gain skills (cultural capital transferable outside the coca field)  Access information from beyond existing social networks	1. Non-agriculturalists (school students)
	Foreground							
NGO-run Courses	Potentially portable but accessed from a specific location	Oral/ aural/ visual	Usually no immediate economic cost	Limitedly dialogic, in-coming (from national/inter national sources)	Broadcast and narrowcast (Interpersonal/ impersonal)	Immediate	Access information from beyond existing social networks	1. Agriculturalists (agricultural extension, health) 2. Non-agriculturalists (micro-finance and health)
	Foreground							

**TABLE 1: Properties of the different communications media.**



from a person's position within the coca *field*, which have to do as well with the other types of capital (Bourdieu 1986). The telephone, the newspaper and the Internet all require an immediate investment of economic capital if access is to be achieved, which will clearly exclude the poorest families. Face-to-face conversation (including most courses) could be said to be entirely free, unless an investment needs to be made in travel to visit a person or attend a course, and unless we take into account the costs involved in maintaining a friendship or a business relationship (Bourdieu 1986:249; Mauss 1990:5). Television viewing is also free, yet an investment of economic capital must have been made previously and now resides in the form of the television set. The same is true of the radio, but in a much less prohibitive way, so that radio listening is free aside from the nominal cost of batteries (cf. Skuse 2005). There is a cost, however, for leaving messages or song requests on the radio, which translates to between 4 and 8 bolivianos, depending on the type of message, whether a personal message, an advertisement, or a political message. Yet beyond the immediate economic investments required, a person's position within the coca *field*, in terms of their labour orientation (agriculturalist or non-agriculturalist), and in terms of their possession of the various types of capital previously discussed (Bourdieu 1986), will have implications for whether they are able to travel to overcome the non-portability of some media, or whether they can forego labour time to foreground a certain medium, whether free or not.

I will now move on to discuss the last three characteristics, which have implications for the type of communication that is able to be carried out via the medium, and consequently for its relevance to certain social groups, and for any sense of ownership that a certain group may or may not come to experience with regards to the medium. These are:

- 4) Direction of information flow
- 5) Broadcast or narrowcast (impersonal or interpersonal)
- 6) Immediacy of message transmission

The fourth characteristic refers to whether the medium allows for bi-directional or dialogic communication, or whether there is a unidirectional information flow that is either directed from outside the ecosystem of coca communications, or from within (cf. Brecht 2006; Contreras Baspineiro 2000b). The implication is that these two groups of media, dialogic and unidirectional, must serve different purposes. The two media that clearly permit dialogic communication are face-to-face communication and the telephone. They allow for dialogic communication that is *narrowcasted* to a specific audience rather than *broadcasted* (our fifth characteristic; see below for further discussion of these terms), and that is immediate, with no time-delay (our sixth characteristic). The telephone, then, would seem to be the medium that is most able to replicate acts of face-to-face speech, the difference being that hearing is the only sense able to be used, ruling out the perception of facial expressions, gesture and so on, which will largely have to be imagined by the interlocutor (cf. Ricoeur 1991). So, it would seem to be the medium of choice for maintaining relationships with dispersed family and friends, for both emotional reasons and for

those practical matters that have to do with maintenance of livelihood (Baym 2002; Horst and Miller 2006; Skuse and Cousins 2007).

However, as we know, the telephone is less accessible to agriculturalists than to townsfolk because of spatial positioning. If not wishing to travel, the medium of choice to achieve this same type of communication for agriculturalists becomes the radio. As will be discussed below, and in more detail in the following chapter, over 50 communities in the Yungas have Radio Yungas *cajitas*, which are two-way radios that can be utilised to make contact with the central station and to give community residents the opportunity to participate directly in radio programmes (cf. Anonymous n.d.). Part of the function of the radio is to allow local people to transmit those sorts of messages that they might otherwise transmit via the telephone, such that participants who have a very specific audience in mind use the radio in a way that might be called 'narrowcasting'. The term narrowcasting has been used for marketing purposes in the communications industry since the 1990s, by which time the idea of a mass radio or television audience had given way to the need to direct programmes at specific target groups (Becker 2006; Naficy 1998). It is also used to refer to those newer media such as cable television, the Internet and podcasting, that can be accessed by the viewer at will and without the restraints imposed by broadcasting schedules (Becker 2006; Hirst and Harrison 2007:359). Sterne (2005) rejects the term, claiming it legitimates what has become the dominant definition of broadcasting, as dissemination of information by a large corporation to a mass audience who have radio or television sets in their homes. He prefers to define 'broadcasting' according to its 18<sup>th</sup> century definition, as scattering seeds on the ground and seeing which ones land and grow, and which do not. This means making information potentially available to people, with 'wide dissemination of content through mechanical or electronic media' (Sterne 2005). According to this definition, what Radio Yungas participants do is broadcasting, yet where they have a specific and limited audience in mind, I will acknowledge their intention by calling it 'false narrowcasting'.

The difference between this and the telephone, is that there is not always an immediate transmission of information between sender and intended recipient (cf. Ricoeur 1991) (some messages may be read out at a later time by the presenter, some recipients may hear of the message via a third party who has been listening to the radio), and that communication between the two interlocutors or groups is not immediately dialogic. Yet, considering spatial positioning and associated economic concerns, radio is often the best medium through which agriculturalists are able to achieve this type of interpersonal communication.

The other medium which may be considered dialogic is the Internet, when it is used in a narrowcasting sense for 'chatting' or emailing, the former immediate and the latter delayed. The difference between this sort of communication and that of the telephone or radio, is of course that it is written, and therefore requires literacy, as stated, but also loses those further elements of spoken discourse that involve not only gesture, but also rhythm of the voice, intonation and perhaps intention, making it further removed from interpersonal face-to-face communication than the

telephone or radio (cf. Baym 2002:65; Ricoeur 1991:146-7).<sup>202</sup> It is not appropriate for a mother wishing to be reassured by hearing her daughter's voice.

The Internet is not always dialogic, however, but becomes unidirectional when used by school students to access information for school projects. With the students, as yet, not having the skills to 'send out' information on the web, the flow is limited to in-coming information from national or international sources (cf. Sassen 1999). The same occurs for print and television, as Yungas residents are not involved in any letter writing or audience participation that may occur to a limited extent in urban areas (cf. Morley 1992). The information in both cases is broadcast to a wide and impersonal audience, and is time-delayed, except in the case of a few live television programmes. The exception is the local television station, JEP A, which I have chosen not to deal with extensively in this study, since few of the people I spoke with watched or participated in the largely experimental locally transmitted programmes, stating that they felt the programmes and presenters to be unprofessional.<sup>203</sup> NGO-run courses could also be said to constitute an inward flow of information, for while classes may involve dialogical communication, the main purpose is usually to transmit information from an external source to a local population.

The media available for accessing information from beyond interpersonal networks then, include Internet, print, television, courses, and one other: the radio. As already established, the first three are more easily accessed by townfolk, while the radio also allows for in-coming flows of information, particularly in the form of national and international news, that can be easily accessed by agriculturalists. The radio has one further element and therefore function that none of the other media do. That is that since the radio has provisions for local participation on a large scale, there exists the capacity for local people to not only false narrowcast, but to broadcast to a wide-reaching regional area at the same time that they engage in on-air dialogue with radio presenters and other participants. It is the only medium available to local people to influence public opinion in any meaningful way, making it an important and strategic one for certain players, and for coca-growers as a group (cf. Alfaro 2006a; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006; Huesca 2006; Rennie 2002; Rodriguez 2002). Energised by and supporting the coca leaf and the coca production system (cf. Chambi Cari 1997), Radio Yungas could be said to be the medium that epitomises what is meant

---

<sup>202</sup> Ricoeur (1991:146-7) recounts Austin (1972; 1975) and Searle's (1972) notion of the 'speech act' as involving the act of saying (locutionary act), that which we do *in* saying (illocutionary act), and that which we do *by* saying (perlocutionary act). The first, he writes, can be exteriorised in the sentence and as such is easily fixed in writing. The second includes those non-articulated aspects of speech, such as rhythm, mimicry and gesture; not so easy to transcribe, yet attempts can be made through choice of grammar and so on. The third, he refers to as stimulus, which acts 'by direct influence upon the emotions and the affective dispositions' of the interlocutor. This is the aspect of speech that is most difficult to transcribe. What this means for our analysis, is that certain elements of a spoken message, or that which would normally be spoken, may be lost when it is transcribed in writing.

<sup>203</sup> JEP A was installed several years ago by a wealthy philanthropist who also owns a hotel near Chulumani. While it has much potential as a communicative medium for local people, this potential had yet to be realised during my fieldwork and few people were willing to tolerate the lack of expertise displayed by its experimental staff (mostly young volunteers). Carmen, a Chulumani store-keeper says, 'They always cut off in the middle of the news. Or you're in the best part of a movie and they put adverts on. They're not trained.' While Regina says, 'I'll watch it if it's about something important (happening in town). Otherwise, no. Those guys don't even know how to produce a programme. They use vulgar words. I think they need to be a bit careful in that aspect, don't you?' An ex-staff member of Radio Yungas took over the management shortly before my fieldwork ended, and aimed to implement some interesting ideas.

by the ecosystem of coca communications, entering in a capillary-like fashion into more communicative crannies and niches than any other.

A clear dichotomy has been established between agriculturalists, who rely largely on face-to-face communication and the radio both to maintain social relationships and to access information from beyond immediate social networks, and non-agriculturalists, who are more likely to use the telephone or (for a select group) Internet to achieve the first aim, and television and newspaper to achieve the second. Of course, as has already been established, there are differences of capital accumulation *within* these two groups, which have implications for media access. The following will use ethnographic material to show how people manoeuvre through the communicative ecosystem, accessing the media available to them to achieve their immediate and long-term goals.

### **Maintaining and Extending Social Networks through Communications Media**

The Yungas is a place of travel, as buyers and sellers journey to the different towns, communities and cities, and as people come and go in search of work and livelihood, exchanging as they do, labour, goods and information. Workers arrive from the *altiplano* to satiate the labour needs of the coca, while Yungueños move to the city to try their hand as a bus driver or a maid. Young people move to the city to study and pursue a career, or further afield, perhaps illegally to sew clothing in Brazil or even Spain, harbouring dreams of fame and fortune, or at least the respect of those back home. Appadurai (1996:33) uses the term *ethnoscape* to refer to this 'landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live' and writes that the stabilities of stable communities and networks of kinship, friendship, work and so on are 'everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move' (ibid.:33-34). As expressed by 72 year-old Raúl on the opening page of this chapter, Yungas people have continually sought ways to maintain their kin and other social networks when these are dispersed, making use of the media available to them according to the technological and political landscape of the moment. The adoption of ICTs represents a continued reaction to the need to extend across space the face-to-face communication that would take place if the element of distance did not need to be accounted for (Horst and Miller 2006:114; McLuhan 1964; Skuse and Cousins 2007<sup>204</sup>).

One of the reasons that people seek to maintain contact with family and friends is the fulfilment of emotional needs, as parents (mothers in particular) worry about their children in the city: whether she is being led astray, or whether he is managing to cook for himself (cf. Skuse and Cousins

---

<sup>204</sup> Skuse and Cousins (2007) call this 'managing distance.'

2007:197).<sup>205</sup> A second reason has to do with livelihood, as communication is sought to arrange and facilitate money transfers to a child in the city or from a family member overseas (cf. Horst and Miller 2006:114-117; Skuse and Cousins 2007:198), as well as to coordinate agricultural activities or secure labourers in order to ensure the smooth functioning of the production and exchange processes. People also communicate with their most trusted networks to receive and provide information about health, agricultural practices, the political situation, and any number of other things (cf. Nair et al. 2006). These immediate and explicit, and often task-oriented aims (Baym 2002) can be considered the 'experience-near' motivations for communication, meaning that they would be consciously expressed as such by those undertaking the communication (Geertz 1989).<sup>206</sup> As analytical observer, I express the underlying work that goes on through these interchanges (the 'experience-distant' motivations) (Geertz 1989; Wikan 1991) as that of maintaining and nurturing existent social networks as well as extending and broadening these, with the ultimate motivation being to protect or accumulate economic capital and livelihood (cf. du Toit et al. 2007; Horst and Miller 2006; Skuse and Cousins 2007).<sup>207</sup>

The following will demonstrate the communicative possibilities of different groups within the ecosystem, in terms of maintaining and extending existing social networks. In an attempt to recreate the interweaving structure of the communicative ecosystem, with its multifarious media and actors, I will follow the actors as they seek communicative pathways to achieving their aims. I hope the journey, which may sometimes appear (but is not) haphazard, is not dizzying. I begin from the focal point of the agriculturalists (*campesinos*), starting in a community, and moving to the town, to assess how communicative possibilities change with a shift in geographical positioning. I will then follow the same discussion from the focal point of the non-agriculturalists (*blancos/mestizos*), looking out from the town toward both the communities and the city. It will become apparent that different individuals, families and groups have differential access to various communications media and are thus variously able to achieve both their 'near' and 'far' aims (Geertz 1989; Wikan 1991), due, on the one hand, to the nature of the different media, as outlined above, and on the other, to people's positions within the coca *field*: their habitus, and the capital of various types that they possess. These two sets of variables coalesce to inform communicative practice.

---

<sup>205</sup> Skuse and Cousins (2007:199) point to the gendered nature of some aspects of communications, noting that 93% of all remittance calls made during their study of telecommunications in South Africa, were made by women. They write that women tend to facilitate the complex social networks on which people rely socially and financially. See also DfID (2006) on gendered technology use, and Riaño's (1994) collection on women engaged in communication.

<sup>206</sup> Baym (2002:63-4) notes, with reference to Lea (1991), that while according to Bales' category system, messages are required to be identified as either socioemotional or task-oriented, they are often multifunctional and incorporate aspects of both (see Bales 1951).

<sup>207</sup> 'Experience-distant' concepts are those pragmatic intentions translated into analytic concepts that, when put to the communicator, it is hoped will be met with the response, 'You know it's right what you say, but it is not the way we think' (Wikan 1991:285). This was thankfully the response I received from my partner when testing such ideas on him, as the only person from the 'field' to whom I had access during this analytical phase of the project.

## The Coca Producers: Networking Community-Town-City-World

The community of Wawa Kuka, Sud Yungas, a two-hour walk or half-hour bus trip to Chulumani, has no postal service.<sup>208</sup> It has an ENTEL public telephone<sup>209</sup>, run by Don Eulogio, but it does not seem to be working. It also has a Radio Yungas *cajita*, the two-way radio 'boxes' that allow community members to communicate their urgent messages and happy birthdays to those family and friends who find themselves on the other side of one or more of the many great, green mountains that form these valleys. These *cajitas* were initially provided by the radio to the most important towns to facilitate participatory communication on the part of the listeners, but today more than 50 communities have purchased one of these apparatuses and elected a community *corresponsal* (correspondent) to be in charge of it (See Chapter Five). Community members can pay to leave a message (*comunicado*) to be read out on the hour by the *corresponsal*, or they can take control of the microphone themselves during the participatory programme, *El Viajero* ('The Traveller'), at 10 a.m. each morning.<sup>210</sup> They can also combine a greeting with a song dedication during the afternoon programme, *Felicitaciones en Familia*, whose name betrays the programme's purpose all too well. Song dedications serve the purpose of allowing family members to keep in touch with each other when they are separated due to work or study (cf. Skuse and Cousins 2007; Horst and Miler 2006). This young girl's message is one such example:

I want to send greetings over there to Naranjani to my Mum Martha Yanarico, to my Dad Alberto Mamani, to my brothers and sisters Jhovana, Cristian, to Rudy and my Uncle Germán, to my Aunt Rufina, to her little daughter and to my Aunt Lidia, to my Aunt Martha and to Gaby and to Paulina, that's all.

(Radio Yungas, *El Viajero*).

This young boy's message had a slightly more immediately practical aspect:

Good morning, I want to send an announcement to Colopampa, to my Dad Leonardo Pariapasa, to tell him not to worry - my Mum might not be able to come. She might arrive late because there are no vehicles going to Asunta. And... that's all.

(Radio Yungas, *El Viajero* programme)

---

<sup>208</sup> There was no official postal system operating in the Yungas during my fieldwork, although there was a post office that was permanently closed. Letters were sent with another traveller.

<sup>209</sup> ENTEL (*Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones*) is the largest telecommunications company in Bolivia, with the most extensive national telecommunications network. Until 2001, when a new law was brought in, ENTEL and fourteen local cooperatives had exclusivity over the market. Also operating in the Yungas is COTEL (Cooperativa de Teléfonos de La Paz, a large local telephone cooperative (ITU 2001:4-5). In 2001, around one fifth of households, or six in 100 inhabitants in Bolivia had a fixed line telephone, 80% of which were in the three largest cities and departments (La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz). There is no universal service policy in the country (ITU 2001:6). See also CITEL (2000).

<sup>210</sup> *El Viajero* is broadcast from a booth at the entrance to the town of Chulumani (the *tranca*), a transport hub where trucks and buses arrive from all directions, so that travellers can use the radio waves to communicate to their family that they have been held up but will be arriving soon. People in the communities can also participate by calling in on the *cajitas* or by telephone, if available.



Many of the messages also serve to facilitate a practical purpose in terms of the coca production system, as indicated in the following example, dictated by one of the radio presenters:

Attention Caranavi sector, Communities of San Pablo, San Juan de la Mina or wherever Señor Juan Jimenez Quispe and his wife Martina Calle are to be found. They must go urgently to the town of Trinidad Pampa. If they are unable to both go, send only Señora Martina Calle, with the purpose of harvesting their coca. Persons who hear this, please pass on the information. Yours faithfully, Señora Arabela Jimenez Quispe.

(Radio Yungas, El Viajero programme)

Radio is the easiest and most reliable way for those who live in the *campo* to maintain contact with those outside the community. Considering the radio according to the characteristics discussed above, 1) it is easily accessible because one need only travel as far as the Radio Yungas 'office', where the *cajita* is situated in the community,<sup>211</sup> 2) it does not require literacy, but preserves the speech aspect of face-to-face communication, 3) the cost of leaving a message may be less than the cost of making a telephone call or travelling (6 bs to make a song request) and is free during participatory programmes, 4) it allows for a bi-directional information flow, meaning that local people can transmit information and be responded to, making it in a sense dialogic, although perhaps delayed, as per criterion number 6, and 5) it allows people to engage in false narrowcasting, as in the examples above.

Yet it cannot function without linking with other media, which is where the idea of communicative ecology makes sense (Slater and Tacchi 2004; Tacchi 2006; Tacchi et al. 2003a). This type of narrowcasting works precisely because it is in fact broadcasting, meaning that if the intended recipient was not listening to the radio at the time the message was broadcast, another member of the community would soon pass the message on. The penultimate sentence of the message above betrays this: 'People who hear this, please pass on the information.' So, the radio works in conjunction with face-to-face communication, perhaps facilitated by travel if the person being sought is some distance away down a mule track or up a hill. In this way, when I broadcast a message announcing that I would arrive in Wawa Kuka on a certain day to discuss a development project with which I was volunteering, a community member trekked up a hill to find and inform the appropriate *dirigentes*, and down to the school to inform the Director. (Unfortunately, in illustration of the fact that there are hazards within this system, as in any other, no one was told the correct day.) On other occasions, Radio Yungas might be used in conjunction with the community loudspeaker, such as occurred in one community when school parents were called to the school to make adobe bricks for a new school building (cf. Konstadakopoulos 2005). Or a telephone may be used to relay a message to the central office where communities do not have a *cajita*.

---

<sup>211</sup> This may be in a shop, a house or a specially designated room, depending on the community and the *corresponsal*. It is usually located somewhere central, such as near the community's football field.

While in theory, the radio waves are the property of all *campesinos* (the townsfolk's relationship with this medium will be discussed in the following section), there is a political economy of access that limits some people's access for certain purposes and which relates to the capital they possess. The young girl cited above feels comfortable sending greetings on the song request programme, but she would not deign to speak on the participatory programme, *Contacto*, which is reserved for serious matters of discussion. The majority of those who take to the microphones during such participatory programmes are *dirigentes* and male, meaning that they have a built up stock of social, cultural and symbolic capital, all of which can be linked back to their economic capital, especially in the form of land (See Chapter Three). To illustrate, through broadcasting his ideas and opinions to a wide listnership, Don Filemón aims to influence discourse (Foucault 1972) through his elocutionary skill (cultural capital), and, at the same time, to achieve the 'experience-distant' goal (Geertz 1989) of accumulating further capital, particularly symbolic (Bourdieu 1986:255) and social, as his and his groups' supporters grow, and social networks are extended:

Unfortunately I am seeing that there has been no sense of conscience on the part of our *dirigentes*... There must be an attempt to call to national public opinion so that they understand that this military base needs to disappear because it is not in our interests in any way.

(*El Viajero*, Radio Yungas)

On the other hand, when Carola was worried that Benjamin had not returned from working in Asunta, she countered my suggestion that she use the radio to contact him by protesting, 'No! Everyone will hear me!' It was not a question of physical access that prevented her from making use of this medium; it was a question of felt authority that had its basis in economic and other forms of capital. As a newly arrived immigrant in the area with no land of her own, and with several debts owed in Chulumani which she was hoping had been forgotten, she did not wish to draw attention to herself, as the true broadcasting nature of this medium requires (cf. du Toit et al. 2007:535).<sup>212</sup> There was also the insecurity of speaking in public that is a result of a lack of cultural capital possessed by most women by virtue of the fact that they have not had the practice opportunities that men have had, particularly in the *sindicato* and other meetings (cf. Ruiz 1994). In turn, this is a manifestation of the habitus (Bourdieu 1977:87; see Chapter Three).

Aurelia does not use the *cajita* either, but in her case, a woman from a well-established family that is active in the *sindicato*, it is because of the relationship that she and her family have with the *corresponsal*. She told me that he had bought the *cajita* himself and kept it at his home across the valley. 'He's the only one who speaks,' she said. 'If people want to leave an *aviso* (message), they go to Chulumani.' Then she added, 'He speaks badly, doesn't he? You would have heard him.'

---

<sup>212</sup> The relationships and social networks that she has managed to construct during her short time in the Yungas and that made these loans available to her, are a form of social capital that first was positive, but that is now a source of consternation, since her inability to repay these debts necessitates that she avoid the people to whom she owes money (cf. du Toit et al. 2007).

Within other communities, there exists some friction between the *corresponsal* and those who wished to be elected for the role, the perks of which include a twenty per cent cut on all messages received, and the possibility to further accumulate capital, having already been in possession of a certain amount in order to be elected for the role (see Chapter Five). Relationships with this important gatekeeper need to be maintained if one is to have easy access to this communicative medium (cf. Bourdieu 1986:249-250; Horst and Miller 2006:109-111; Mauss 1990:5-7; Skuse and Cousins 2007:189).

Let us leave the radio aside for a moment. Where communities have a telephone, *comunarios* might make use of this to communicate with other communities or towns. However these are often out of order, or cannot be used because they require phone cards that are not available (cf. Skuse and Cousins 2007:190). Aurelia says, 'We have an ENTEL here, but there is no phone card to be bought. Most of us go to Chulumani to call.' Where neither radio nor telephone are an option, residents of Wawa Kuka must resort to travel to engage in communication with those beyond the confines of the community, or must send a message with another traveller. Aurelia says:

When we need to communicate with another community or town, we send a person. We send the *vocal*.<sup>213</sup> He leaves a piece of paper. If there were mobile phones, telephone – that's what we need. If the Municipalities could put one in (a mobile phone tower). If we need to communicate with Chulumani, we send by truck, or we go ourselves.

As Aurelia shifts her geographical position through travelling from the community to the town, she also shifts her position within the communicative ecosystem, and different communicative opportunities become available to her. On the one hand, she is able to communicate face-to-face with the woman who owes her money and who has not responded to the repeated messages she left on the radio, asking to meet with her. In this case, face-to-face communication is likely to be more effective because of its immediacy and dialogic nature, and because secondary aspects of speech such as gesture and so on can be used to convey intention and work to elicit a favourable response (cf. Ricoeur 1991:147). On Saturday mornings, I could be guaranteed to receive several knocks on the door from *dirigentes* wishing to discuss an aspect of one of NGO *Vida's* development projects, after completing their market shopping or on their way to La Paz to sell their coca.

Most people will try to incorporate such communicative activities into their usual work or shopping routine so as to minimise the loss of work time and of money spent on travel, which has the important implication that those who are more likely to maintain regular contact with certain members of their social network are those who travel regularly for the purposes of trade. These are, as discussed in the previous chapter, those coca growers who own sufficient land and have

---

<sup>213</sup> A person elected by the *sindicato*, one of whose roles is to relay messages where necessary.

the necessary social capital to be able to avail of sufficient labour to make trade worthwhile. Those who must make an extra journey risk doing so *en vano* (in vain), as there is no guarantee that the person they wish to visit will be in town. This was illustrated to me succinctly one day while I was conducting a communications survey in Irupana's town plaza. Another man arrived and sat down next to us to listen, saying he was from a community 'across there,' and pointing out across the valley. He had come to find someone in the town, but that person was not around, so he had come *en vano*. He would rest with us a few minutes before embarking on the hour-long walk home having wasted valuable labour time.

One woman who has time to travel is Doña Filomena. She is from Asunta, a colonisation zone with relatively flat, unexploited land which facilitates coca production on a scale that cannot be replicated in the traditional zones. Having large extensions of land, she stops off in Chulumani to take advantage of the medium of radio to place an announcement calling for more workers to harvest her fields immediately. She would be leaving at 10 a.m. with those interested. The radio, as a broadcaster, enabled her to widen her labour base through extending her social networks (cf. du Toit et al. 2007; Nair et al. 2006). Those from Asunta have a reputation for being better off than other *campesinos*, and exploit their position within the coca *field* to dominate the participation in certain programmes, leading one man who grows coca in an isolated area one hour's walk from Huancané to say, '*El Viajero* is more for those from Asunta. They use it more. *Felicitaciones en Familia* ('Family Greetings') is more for us.'<sup>214</sup>

People like Aurelia who are unable to access the radio *cajita* in their community, may be able to make use of this medium after travelling to the town. There, she can leave a message at the central office to be broadcast, or line up to participate in *El Viajero* if she is feeling brave. She might also join the long weekend queues for the ENTEL or COTEL public telephones, as does fellow community member Renata who has children studying in other cities as well as family members in the mining community where she originated. She says, 'From Chulumani I speak to Sucre, Llalagua, Siglo Veinte.' Likewise, Aurelia uses the ENTEL telephone in Chulumani to call her son in Spain. As a narrowcasting, dialogic and immediate medium that most closely replicates face-to-face communication, these mothers find the telephone is best for communicating with their scattered children. 'But it's expensive,' says Aurelia. '5 bolivianos per minute.' The costs of telephone usage tend to be higher in rural than in urban areas, excluding those with less economic

---

<sup>214</sup> La Asunta lies at a lower altitude around four hours' journey from Chulumani, and until 2006 after changes implemented by the Morales administration, was deemed by the government to be an illicit coca growing zone, as opposed to traditional zones such as Chulumani and Irupana (Congreso Nacional 1988; La Razón 2006a). There is tension between the traditional growers and those from colonisation zones, for economic reasons and also for reasons related to cultural capital, as illustrated by this quote from a coca grower from the Irupana area: 'I think in Asunta they should limit (coca production), because I think that for us it's not fair that there is so much difference that some for example do a really hard job and others grab hold (of the land), they do it in a really simply way (not the traditional way), and we earn the same, or maybe we're worse off than they are, because they harvest up to four times a year. Every two and a half months, because of the heat, ... so they have double the production. Because the fields are flat, the coca grows more, so cultivation is easier.' Another Chulumani coca grower demonstrated the cultural divide, saying, 'Here, we are traditional cultivators. Our reality is very different from that of the Chapare where they're all immigrants, all colonisers. Here, we've always been here cultivating our coca. You will have seen the *wachus*, how we cultivate using the *paleta*, a way of packing the earth... we've always done that.'

capital who are already at a disadvantage in terms of being able to physically access this medium, as discussed.<sup>215</sup> Skuse and Cousins (2007:187) write that extending telecommunications to rural areas may in fact, whilst helping to connect disparate social networks spanning rural and urban areas, 'create new forms of inequality and exclusion.'<sup>216</sup>

...a lack of telecommunications access may reflect significant processes that work to exclude particular groups of people, ostensibly the poorest or those lacking local social networks, from communication, from society, economy and polity, or conversely, incorporate them on highly unequal terms.

(Skuse and Cousins 2007:193)

So, while those who travel along the trade lines of the communicative ecosystem to the towns and the cities are able to widen their possibilities for maintaining and building social relationships (through face-to-face communication, use of the telephone, radio and even the Internet to reach relatives overseas [see Chapter Six]), Carola is left behind in the community with few options for communication with her family members who live far away on the banks of Lake Titicaca, and few possibilities for calling upon them as a social and financial safety net. 'The telephone is no good. It's too far away,' she says. Within the communities, those in the best position in terms of access to the key resources that are land, social capital and labour, are best able to employ a combination of communications media to maintain their existing social networks and build upon their stock of capital. In general terms, the media available to the greatest number of *campesinos* for achieving these aims are face-to-face communication and the radio, which contrasts quite dramatically to the case of the townsfolk, as we shall now see.

### **The Non-Producers: Networking Town-Community-City-World**

'Your Mum?' says Doña Regina to Warita as we are buying vegetables in the Chulumani market of a Saturday. 'She owes me for chickens. I never see her anymore. Would she be in the plaza right now? Tell your Mum to come and find me?' We were safely two hours away by truck when Warita said to her mother, 'Doña Regina said you owe her for chickens.' 'Oh, you should have told me back there,' said Carola. 'It will have to be next week.' Despite the advent of newer technologies, face-to-face communication continues to fulfil needs in ways other media cannot because it requires no literacy or other skills (cf. Kellner 2002), it involves no immediate cost (except perhaps for travel), it permits immediate, dialogic communication (Ricoeur 1991), and importantly, it is

---

<sup>215</sup> Charges vary across Bolivia, due to the multiplicity of telephone cooperatives throughout the country (ITU 2001). However, with little competition, local phone booth operators in rural areas have the freedom to charge what they like, and there is no access to the cheaper *telecentros* that can be found in large cities like La Paz.

<sup>216</sup> Another way in which the arrival of telephony might enhance inequalities is through the entrepreneurial opportunities a small-scale telecommunications business can afford to local elites (Skuse and Cousins 2007:193). In the case of the Yungas, however, this would not constitute a 'new form of inequality,' as it is those who already occupy an elevated socio-economic position who have been able to take advantage of such opportunities.

narrowcasted, which is particularly important if the matter at hand is a sensitive one. Carola knows the power of such communication, and does what she can to avoid a meeting with Doña Regina.

Salespeople like Doña Regina have the relative luxury of knowing that if they wait long enough, the person they need to see, or someone who can relay the message to them (with varying effect), will pass by their market stall on the weekend. Rubina, who is originally from a small community in the *altiplano*, is able to incorporate communication with her social networks into her regular trade routine as she runs into people from her home town when she travels to La Paz each week to buy goods for her store. 'They tell me all the news,' she says. Jorge, a young person from the town, says when I ask what he does if he needs to contact someone from another town or community, 'Voy nomás.' 'I just go.'

If needing to communicate with a person from a community, some townsfolk will make use of Radio Yungas, although Doña Regina is typical of the townsfolk when she says, 'It's mostly a radio of the *campesinos*, isn't it? They're the only ones who use it. Their family greetings, etc. They're all people from the *campo*. It's okay, because there are so many places where the telephone doesn't reach.' The wife of the descendant of one of the *hacienda* landlords, who runs an eco-tourist resort on their property, says, 'My husband sometimes listens to Radio Yungas, but with scepticism. They have a lot of announcements about mules being in the way and so on.' These women feel excluded from this communicative medium because their lives are removed from the discourse of agricultural work and *campesino* politics that fill the airwaves. They inhabit a separate labour group, a separate class and a separate ethnicity (See Chapter Three).<sup>217</sup> They feel much more comfortable using the telephone, as it does not require them to broadcast, but allows for true narrowcasting, meaning that they do not have to operate within a discourse that is unfamiliar to them (Foucault 1972), or place their habitus under conditions that it is not suited to (cf. Bourdieu 1977:78).

The telephone is not ideal for making contact with people in the communities, as during the day a mass exodus to the fields leaves the community empty, while after 6 p.m. the phone is permanently engaged, or the person being sought unavailable or inebriated. This highlights the superior usefulness of radio in ensuring that the message will eventually reach its destination, which can be attributed to its nature as a broadcaster. One *dirigente* told me that the person who operated the telephone booth in his community never came to inform him of a telephone call because of a rivalry between them. With radio, the chances of success are higher. However, as the medium that is most able to retain the properties of face-to-face communication due to its being dialogic, narrowcasted and immediate, the telephone is an invaluable tool with which townsfolk are able to communicate with those family and friends who have departed the Yungas for the cities or abroad. Regina's three children are studying in different cities in Bolivia, and she communicates with them

---

<sup>217</sup> The latter is from the United States and therefore excluded unequivocally from categories such as *campesino*, despite living in the *campo*. (She does not share the labour practices of the *campesinos*).



via telephone. 'I call them, the kids, or they call me. Not letters anymore.' Women, more so than men, see the maintenance of regular contact with their children as essential (cf. DfID 2006; Skuse and Cousins 2007:199). Interestingly, when I asked survey participants the general question, 'How do you receive most of your information?' men would usually respond in terms of access to local and national news, while women tended to respond by explaining how they communicated with their children, suggesting that for them, this type of information was the most important.

Many of these phone calls also serve the practical purpose of arranging money transfers (cf. Horst and Miller 2006:114-117; Skuse and Cousins 2007:198), while others facilitate trade practices. In this way, when Rubina travels to La Paz to stock up on goods for the store, her husband Don Anton telephones her to let her know what has been sold and what she should buy more of. When Lupe travels to La Paz as a coca intermediary, she can use the telephone to ask her husband what price the coca is selling at in Chulumani, and taking advantage of that knowledge, maximise her economic gains by selling at an opportune time. In order to maximise their gains in terms of material exchange, people take advantage of both their social networks (social capital), and the technologies that are available to them and which best meet their needs according to the goals to be achieved (cf. Nair et al. 2006; Slater and Tacchi 2004; Wilkin et al. 2007).

But as in the communities, this medium is not equally accessible to all, and it is here that both economic capital and social networks play a part. Perhaps prompted by the fact that her youngest daughter was now studying in La Paz, Regina and her family saw the need to install a telephone in their house toward the end of my time in the Yungas. They would join the ranks of a very few families who have a telephone in their house: those families who can afford the high line rental costs. Maxi and Guadalupe, an elderly couple who own a store in town, also have a telephone, and complain that they pay 120 or 180bs per month (US\$15 to \$22.50), despite not making many calls. 'We don't call much,' says Maxi. 'Mostly they call us. We've never called overseas. But they call us from the United States, Germany. I have brothers and sisters there.' To facilitate the maintenance of these important, and potentially financially beneficial, social networks, Maxi and Guadalupe pay almost half of what constitutes a regular monthly wage in the Yungas (cf. ISRG n.d.).<sup>218</sup>

Most people are unable to make such sacrifices, and instead make use of the public telephone booths that are a hub of activity on weekends, with many people sitting to patiently wait for a promised call. Mariana, who runs a timber yard in Chulumani, has a son working in a clothes factory in Brazil, whom she is deeply worried about, having not heard from him in a long time. She uses the public telephone to call her brother-in-law, also in Brazil, who manages to make contact with her son, Andrés, and asks him to call her. The number passed on to Andrés is that of Maxi and Guadalupe, who live a few doors down from Mariana and who were good friends with Mariana's father when he was still alive. When the long awaited call arrives, Guadalupe goes to

---

<sup>218</sup> See Information Society Research Group (ISRG) (n.d.) who write, 'poor people make investments in ICTs to maintain complex family networks that enable both money (remittances) and employment to be secured.'

find an ecstatic Mariana. In order to finally facilitate communication with her son, Mariana has combined the use of telecommunications technology with the strategic use of a four-point network of social relationships stretching between herself in Chulumani, via kin-based ties in Sao Paolo, to her son with no known address, and back to herself via an enduring social relationship spanning two generations. She has utilised what du Toit et al. refer to as:

...the meta-literacy of social capital itself - the ability to work it, and the knowledge of strategy in the ceaseless, day-to-day acts of power and exchange that constitute the intimate politics of survival in a context where so much power is caught up in currencies other than money.

(2007:533)

It is here too that perhaps she fails, for after having searched the streets for Mariana one too many times, Guadalupe ceases to do so, and as Mariana discovers later, her son's calls begin to go unreported, rupturing again this delicately woven communicative web. By entering into a phone borrowing relationship with this couple, Mariana had in a sense entered into a dependent reciprocal relationship, where it would be expected that she would return a favour when called upon to do so (cf. Bourdieu 1986:249-250; du Toit et al. 2007:528; Mauss 1990:5-7; Skuse and Cousins 2007:187,198; Wolf 2001:179). However, perhaps there was nothing that Maxi and Guadalupe needed from her, and they felt that they were not benefiting enough from this contract. In any case, the careful nurturing of social networks, combined with available communication technologies, is needed to maintain existing social networks where these are stretched across distance, and to avoid the permanent loss of contact with family members experienced by many, including Raúl, Rubina and Benjamin, who constitute a part of the migratory *ethnoscapes* of today's world (Appadurai 1996:33-34).<sup>219</sup>

The newest addition to the ecosystem of coca communications during my fieldwork was the Internet, with Chulumani's first Internet telecentre being installed shortly before my arrival in the Yungas in 2003 (See Chapter Six).<sup>220</sup> The Internet was used mainly by school-aged children from two separate groups; those from the town's wealthier families, many of whom studied in La Paz during the term and returned to Chulumani for school holidays, and those from the wealthier *campesino* families who were in a position within the coca *field* that enabled them to absorb the daily living expenses incurred by sending their child to study in town, whilst foregoing the child's labour during term-time. There was also a very small group of regular adult users from the wealthier sector of the town, who were accompanied by professionals from La Paz who had been

---

<sup>219</sup> Rubina no longer has contact with some members of her family, after most of the inhabitants of the small town where she grew up on the *altiplano* abandoned the area in search of better economic circumstances in the 1980s. Benjamin has lost contact with a sister who travelled to another part of the country. As an epilogue to Mariana's story, she continued to make contact with her brother-in-law, until he encouraged Andrés to return to Bolivia. Now both mother and son live and work together in La Paz, constituting a triumph for telecommunications technology and social networking.

<sup>220</sup> Since the end of my fieldwork, a mobile phone tower has been installed, facilitating the use of this medium in the Chulumani area.

posted in Chulumani for a short period, and the odd tourist. Regina's youngest daughter, residing in the first group, is one of the young people who made the telecentre her home during the holidays. She and her friends used the Internet for the most part to chat with or email the school friends they had left back in La Paz, meaning that they extended online those same relationships they experienced offline, and worked to maintain and strengthen important peer relationships (cf. Miller and Slater 2000). On occasions, students experimented with widening their social networks through the creation of a cyber network in which they met and built on-line relationships with cyber friends, boyfriends and girlfriends.<sup>221</sup>

The 'experience-distant' motivation of maintaining social relationships is sometimes overlaid upon a more practical and 'near' motivation (Geertz 1989), and young people might use Internet in conjunction with other media to achieve this. The following email, written to neglectful *padrinos* (godparents) in Australia, is an illustration of how people employ a combination of media to achieve their communication goals, and 'manage relationships in multiple media' (Baym 2002:72):

Hi Nadia and Coco it's Marcelina's birthday it's the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August she's turning 8 I'm going in to Chulumani on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. And another thing guys My new number is 73052783 mum has the 71835067 now since she didn't have a mobile now you can call her there Bye answer me as soon as possible okay byeeeeeeee and say hello to everyone.....

The email imparts the important information of the upcoming birth-date of the god-daughter (*ahijada*) and serves as a reminder to send, via email, a customised card. It serves also as a strategic referral to the telephone. Upon receiving the awaited phone call (to be paid for by the Australian contingent), the brother will print off the customised card, purchase a stuffed bear and travel from La Paz to Chulumani, thereby to deposit bear and card with said god-daughter. In this way, the accomplices draw upon the media available and most appropriate to them within the communicative ecosystem – Internet, telephone and travel for face-to-face interaction – to facilitate the necessary expenditure of capital, in line with the laws of *compadrazgo* (See Chapter Three), to maintain and reproduce important social relationships (Bourdieu 1986:249-50; 1990:126; du Toit et al. 2007:531; Mauss 1990:5). The Internet, inexpensive compared to the telephone, serves to initiate the communication, yet the telephone is still found in this case to be a better medium for making immediate contact and for enabling constructive and plan-making dialogue between people who are in different time zones and who do not have constant Internet access. Finally, face-to-face communication will facilitate not only the delivery of the gift in an area without a postal service, but also, as the most intimate form of communication, a cementing and reaffirmation of an important relationship between families.<sup>222</sup>

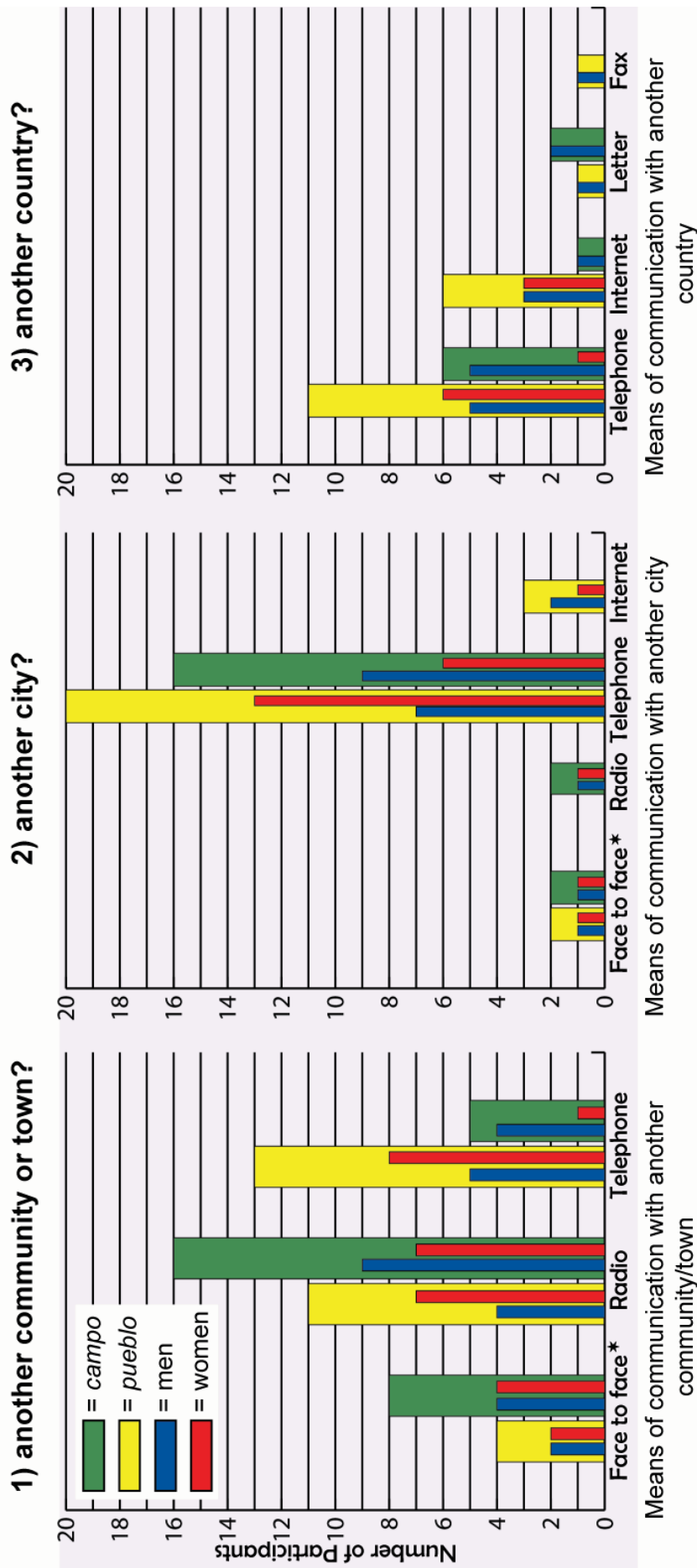
---

<sup>221</sup> This was mostly a pastime for young people, but even some adults became involved, such as Larson, a coca-grower from a community near Irupana. He says, 'I use it accompanied by my children in La Paz. I have friends all over the world. I want to open my page, to be able to communicate with everyone.'

<sup>222</sup> As it happened, on this occasion the well laid plans were foiled, as the brother remained waylaid finalising coca transactions in Santa Cruz on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August.

**FIGURE19: Responses by survey participants to the question:**

**What do you do if you need to communicate with a person in:**



Respondents included 22 people from the *pueblo* (4 men, 13 women) and 22 people from the *campo* (12 men and 10 women). Some respondents gave multiple answers, and some had never undertaken these forms of communication, eg: with a person in another country. (Note that while the sample size is small, additional participant-observation work shows it to be representative).

\* Face-to-face includes travel, meetings and sending a message (written or verbal) with another person.

In Chulumani, the Internet could potentially have replaced the telephone in serving the function of allowing parents, such as Regina, to pass a recipe to a child in La Paz, or for someone like Don Anton to send to Rubina a list of goods to be purchased. It shares with the telephone the potential for immediate dialogic communication ('chat'), although an email would be sufficient for achieving such practical purposes, and it is narrowcast. It may also have been slightly cheaper to send a brief email than to make a phone call to La Paz. The reasons this did not happen, are that on the one hand, people do like to achieve as close as possible to a face-to-face exchange, and the telephone retains the aural aspect of this experience, and on the other, the Internet requires not only literacy of a highly functional standard, but also the technical competency to operate a computer. Both Regina and Rubina say that they do not have the time to acquire these skills, and the effort necessary to acquire them is unlikely to be offset by any benefits, since they are already achieving their communicational aims satisfactorily through use of the telephone.

Because of its inherent properties, as already discussed, access to the Internet was restricted to those who fulfilled a strict set of criteria: they had ease of physical access because of their geographical positioning (it is non-portable); they had spare time which they were not having to devote to the family's business activities (it must be foregrounded); they had the economic capital to spend on the relatively high hourly cost (it costs 7 bs per hour or just under US\$1); they had functional literacy and the confidence and time to learn new skills (it is a written medium) and they had a need for this type of communication (directed to a place outside the Yungas) and could therefore see the relevance in the Internet for their lives.<sup>223</sup> The only group who fit all of these criteria were the school students from families who occupied a certain position within the coca *field*, and the other select groups mentioned above.<sup>224</sup> There is one final criterion, which dichotomously excludes agriculturalists, whilst including non-agriculturalists, and that is the ability to experience a sense of ownership over the medium. In large part because of the way the telecentre project was implemented, just as Regina feels that Radio Yungas is 'a radio of the *campesinos*,' the *campesinos* feel that the Internet is something for townfolk. This will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

We have explored the ways in which the two separate 'thought categories' of agriculturalist and non-agriculturalist utilise different communications media to achieve their immediate goals of fulfilling an emotional need, gaining financial security, facilitating agricultural or other business activities (Baym 2002; Horst and Miller 2006; Skuse and Cousins 2007), and their underlying goals of maintaining and extending kin and non-kin social networks, protecting and accumulating capital. It will have become apparent that the former are much more likely to make use of face-to-face communication (through travel) and the radio to achieve these goals, while the latter are more likely

---

<sup>223</sup> Bourdieu (1986:246) writes that a person's possibilities for acquisition of cultural capital (in this instance, computing skills) depends in part on 'the length of time for which his family can provide him with the free time, i.e., time free from economic necessity.'

<sup>224</sup> There were also two older regular users who communicated with relatives overseas, and one retired journalist who used the Internet with help from his daughter, during his visits to La Paz. He sent articles he had written to a journal in the United States for publication. This journal had initially contacted him by sending a letter to the newspaper he worked with in La Paz, but now they make all exchanges via email.

to use telephone, and in some cases, Internet (see Table 19). *Within* these groups, people's access to and inclination to use the different media depends in large part on their position within the coca *field* (their situation in terms of land ownership, labour, and exchange relations), in relationship with the particular nature of the media themselves. I will now turn to assess the ways in which people negotiate being a part of the wider (global) communicative ecosystem as they look to access information not available to them through their immediate social networks.

### **Accessing Information from beyond Interpersonal Networks**

Appadurai (1996:41) has described the world as 'one large, interactive system, composed of many complex subsystems.' Castells (2004:3) envisages global networks which have to do with the 'organizational arrangements of humans in relations of production, consumption, reproduction, experience, and power expressed in meaningful communication coded by culture.' Specifically, he writes, today's global networks are powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies. Lash (2002:75) writes that today, power is expressed through inclusion and exclusion 'from the loops of information and communication flows' (cf. Castells 2004:23). These interactions might be said to take place in the form of a global communicative ecosystem (Tacchi et al. 2003a); a large web spanning and connecting the globe, yet comprised of potentially identifiable sub-ecosystems such as our ecosystem of coca communications, where communicative processes, inclusions and exclusions form a pattern unique to that local system.

People in the Yungas receive information on health and agriculture and on the country's political situation through their kin and friendship networks, as discussed above. They supplement this with information that filters in to the ecosystem of coca communications from beyond those networks, via a variety of avenues that include radio, television, newspaper, Internet, courses and seminars. People access a combination of these media as they are able depending on their situation within the coca *field* as discussed in Chapter Three, whether they be coca producer or non-producer, landed, have access to social and labour networks, are active in the organisational institutions of their community, and engage in travel for trade. No one is entirely excluded from global networks. To suggest as much would be to deny the strategic capacities of individuals to make use of the media, and particularly the social networks available to them. However, the social and geographical differentiation that exists within the ecosystem of coca communications certainly has implications for different people's possibilities to access different communications media, with their different properties.



## The Coca Producers: Accessing National and Global Informational Networks

Lizet's baby is ill and Benjamin's coca has a pest. Lizet's mother prepares a mixture of eucalyptus and camomile for the baby, and Aurelia says to her as they harvest in the coca field, 'You have to give him orange juice. He'll get better with that; you'll see how he'll get better.' Several fields away, Benjamin receives advice from his landlord on how to cure the pest. Don Gregorio, born in the Yungas and whose parents migrated from Peru, says proudly and defiantly, 'We, as cultivators, know perfectly. We know more than we need to know about agriculture, through descent.'<sup>225</sup> This is partly a reaction to the sorts of top-down agricultural extension projects that have operated in the area, and where people were often given uninformed or unrealistic advice that contradicted their locally inherited knowledge (cf. Léons 1997; Spedding 1989). Don Gregorio tells Benjamin to kill the bugs with a stick while they are sleeping in their burrow, and takes the opportunity to explain about the indicator plants and animals. The Glorifuyente flower, a certain snail, the way the Maria bird flies near the coca, the wind, the shape and angle of the moon, the sound and smell of the coca itself, all inform the *cocalero* on whether it will rain, whether the price of the coca will rise or fall and whether the time is right to harvest or lay the coca out to dry. 'Our customs are more reliable,' he says. 'The word of the scientists fails us.' It is here that communication and information exchange begins; in the coca field, in the family and in the close social network of neighbours and *compadres*. We will now follow the journeys of first Benjamin, and then Lizet, as they seek to fulfil information needs, on agriculture and health respectively (two of the most important topics for Yungas people), that have not been satisfied by these interpersonal networks.

To begin with, as the leaves are harvested and information offered (although never for free [Mauss 1990]), other voices and sounds form a part of the soundscape of the coca field (Corbin 1998; Feld 1990; Schafer 1977; Tacchi 1998; 2000; 2002a; Westerkamp 1994). Aside from the whispers and shouts and laughter of the *k'ichiri* (coca harvesters), there is the constant murmuring of the radio; sometimes foregrounded as an important message or piece of news is transmitted, ('Escuchaste?' 'Did you hear?'), sometimes backgrounded to the conversation going on (Spitulnik 2002; Tacchi 1998).<sup>226</sup> Carola says, 'If there are people, we talk more than we listen.' Sometimes the radio is left behind in the *wachu* (coca terrace) as the workers make their way steadily up the hill harvesting each row of trees until the 'something missing' is noticed and someone rushes back down the hill to retrieve it.

Benjamin might learn something further about his pest on Radio Yungas' popular nightly show, *Akhulli*, broadcast mostly in Aymara. The programme offers a limited amount of agricultural information, although some complain that the presenters are not professional agronomists, and look to supplement this by turning to La Paz-based Radio Fides, Illimani and Panamericana, and

---

<sup>225</sup> This comment was elicited when I asked whether there were sufficient information available about agriculture.

<sup>226</sup> Tacchi (1998:27) discusses the idea of foregrounded radio sound, when the sound emanating from the radio becomes the most important part of the soundscape, as opposed to radio sound as 'background texture, in some instances creating a rhythm by which to live.' Spitulnik (2002:342) also discusses the way in which radio listening alternates with conversation in group settings and how some listeners are more attentive than others at various times.

the predominantly Aymara-language Radio San Gabriel, which broadcasts from El Alto.<sup>227</sup> Benjamin listens mostly to Radio Yungas, although this is not completely of his own choosing, for while neither the cost of a radio set, nor the cost of batteries is prohibitive for most families in the Yungas (cf. Skuse 2005), what is more interesting than the limitations of physical ownership of communication tools, are the limitations of access and choice that are a consequence of social and geographical differentiation.<sup>228</sup>

Firstly, the authority to influence the information to be received is closely related to position within the coca *field*. On days when Benjamin and Carola harvest their own field alone, they switch frequently between Radio Yungas, Radio Sol (the La Paz-based Evangelical broadcaster), and other stations that they are able to tune in to.<sup>229</sup> When working with a large group of people, Benjamin and Carola do not change the channel so much, and spend most of the day listening to Radio Yungas. Those who own land and work their own land are more likely to choose the station that is listened to, than those who only work for others. In other words, those established families who are better situated in terms of property relations and have a greater pull of available labour, are more likely to influence the types of information that is accessed. A person such as sixteen-year-old migrant worker Lupita, who is employed by Aurelia's family in return for room and board and does not have a radio of her own, is dependent upon the choices of others for her information diet.<sup>230</sup>

Secondly, Benjamin told me that the reason he and his family do not listen to a wider variety of radio stations is because Radio Yungas has the best reception. In a communications diary I asked Benjamin to fill in (see an excerpt in Appendix F) he wrote, 'The role of (television channel) 7 and the two communication radios mentioned seems routine, but it's not like that. What happens is that these media are the ones that come out across the airwaves with clarity. That is why we tune in to these broadcasters.' This contrasts to the situation in town, where non-producers are able to tune in to a much wider variety of programmes, highlighting one instance in which a group of people, in

---

<sup>227</sup> An interesting example of the use of radio for building upon and exchanging agricultural information can be found in the Canadian Farm Radio Forums. The model included listener groups in which neighbours would group together to listen to a weekly radio programme dealing with agricultural issues, and would then discuss these and work to implement new ideas in their communities. It also included a report-back mechanism whereby listener groups' conclusions and responses would be collated centrally and broadcast on the radio, as well as being made available to government agencies. This model has been adapted and utilised in various countries, including India (Neurath 1962) and Zambia (Bobbili and Luczynska n.d.). See Shugg (2007) and Sim (n.d.).

<sup>228</sup> When asked, people say that batteries are expensive. However, radio listening is valued to such an extent that batteries are a budgeting priority and will always be purchased. The radios used by all *campesinos* are of the large, black variety that can be slung over the shoulder when walking to work, and which use long-lasting batteries. When I had my small tape-recording radio with me, people would often switch their radio off, allowing me to absorb the cost of consumption.

<sup>229</sup> An excerpt from my fieldnotes, describing a day spent harvesting Carola and Benjamin's coca field: 'During the day we listened to Radio Illimani. (President) Mesa's speech was being relayed, after which two men gave a commentary and analysis of it. Mesa mentioned how his government had got rid of corruption in some sector or another, and Carola said, 'Is there really no corruption anymore?! As if!' Benjamin said, 'He's just saying so.' Mesa also said the government would give 100bs to every pregnant woman, provided she undertook obligatory health check-ups. Carola said she thought this would send the country bankrupt, what with there being so many pregnant women. 'Everyone will go out and get pregnant!' she said. After that we switched to Radio Yungas, and listened to *El Viajero* and *El Deportivo* (the sports programme). During the day we also listened to Radio Sol, the Evangelical radio station from La Paz. They were transmitting live from a meeting in La Paz where everyone was singing and praying for Bolivia to find a way out of its problems. Later we switched to Radio Yungas again to hear some of *Felicitaciones en Familia*. (The song request programme). We harvested until 5 p.m.'

<sup>230</sup> This could change, depending on her ability to exert her own legitimacy on the family as time goes by, and concurrently with her ability to establish herself more firmly within the community, perhaps aiming to secure some land of her own, or to become a *yerna* (in-law) of the area by securing a husband.

this case characterised by labour, class and ethnicity (See Chapter Three), are excluded from certain 'loops of information and communication flows' (Lash 2002:75; cf. Castells 2004:23). The same holds for television, where certain topographical pockets are left without reception in this mountainous region. 'We used to get it,' says Carola. Enrique, who lives in a near-by community and has access to three channels, says, 'They say ATB has reception, but it doesn't'.

Almost all established families in areas with electricity own a television set, many with thanks to a coop society loan.<sup>231</sup> Yet those who live in unelectrified communities, or live in a *choza* (leaf hut) near their coca field to save walking long distances, together with those migrant workers who are not planning to stay long enough to warrant the purchase of a television, do not have regular access to this medium. While I was in the Yungas, the community in which Benjamin and Carola had settled, installed a hydroelectric generator and experienced electricity for the first time, much to the joy of the children who were now able to watch television and DVDs. However, it was not long before a stick became lodged in the machinery, robbing the people of this new-found luxury.<sup>232</sup> But in any case, television will never form the central part of people's lives in the *campo* in the same way that it does for those in the *pueblo*, for as Aurelia says, 'You can't take your television set to the coca field' (cf. Spitulnik 2002:346). Because of the nature of their labour activities, the television viewing of coca producers is mostly restricted to evenings after returning home from the fields, when it can be foregrounded or watched whilst undertaking household chores. In contrast, a town shopkeeper might have the television permanently playing in the corner of the shop. Because it is non-visual, radio has the advantage of being able to be backgrounded, and hence can form a part of the context of the everyday (cf. Scannell 1991:3; Spitulnik 2002:338; Tacchi 1998:43; 2000:293).

Benjamin envisages the television in terms of a link to a world outside and beyond the Yungas. 'Now there are some channels that have an outlet to the rest of the world,' he says. '*Una salida al exterior*. Red 1, Unitel, Bolivisión, Channel 7. They have an outlet, an entrance'. Yet, because of the fact that this medium is not dialogic but allows only for a unidirectional information flow which is in-coming from external sources, it is largely oblivious to the specific needs of what for a national television network is a minority population (cf. Beltrán 2006a:81; McAnany 2006).<sup>233</sup> Many Yungueños watch an agricultural programme on the State channel, Channel 7, but say that it does not provide enough information that is useful to them. Enrique tells me:

We used to get Channel America, from Peru. There was a programme about production, how to give an injection to an animal, and so on. But with the parabolic

---

<sup>231</sup> Even families who struggle to adequately feed, clothe and school their children are likely to have made the purchase of a television and DVD player, because of the importance placed upon these apparatuses in terms of information access, entertainment, and symbolic capital. A woman who previously worked in the Coop Society in Chulumani said, 'Everyone has a TV. Everbody has one. I know, because when I worked in the Coop Society the thing that sold most was TVs.' Similarly, see Spitulnik (2002) and Skuse (2005) on the 'socio-symbolic significance' bestowed upon radio sets as markers of social status and symbols of global connection.

<sup>232</sup> Carola's landlady said, 'We got used to it, and now we don't have it anymore! It was easier to do something at night at home. The kids to do their homework. The Mums to sew, to do something. Without light, it gets dark, we eat and just go to sleep. That's all we can do!' The machinery was eventually repaired, but continued to experience problems periodically.

<sup>233</sup> Beltrán (2006a:81) wrote that since communicating with Latin American peasants was not directly or immediately lucrative, the private mass media left this task to government rural education efforts.

antennas, we can't get the signal anymore. It helped me a lot – for example about bananas, how to cure the plant if it has a disease, and so on. They also informed us about poultry farming. There are programmes on Channel 7, but they're based on private companies. They don't explain how to raise animals... There is no information here. We just leave it to its luck if a pest attacks the plant.

With the television providing no help, Benjamin hoped to attend an agricultural extension course being held in the area by an NGO. At the time of my fieldwork, such courses were not operating in the Chulumani area, having been disallowed due to their prior association with the eradication of coca. However, in the Irupana area where Benjamin settled most recently, NGO *Claridad* and the *campesino* organisation CORACA that it helped to found, have been active in training over the last twenty years, and many people in this area cite their courses as having provided them with useful agricultural information (cf. Rajendran et al. 2007). As a form of face-to-face communication, they are potentially a good way of transmitting information, as dialogue can take place and questions can be asked and queries clarified where necessary. One man said:

I have ecological coca... With plants we prepare ecological fertilisers... CORACA taught us three years ago... With chemicals, it produces more, but it doesn't last. Irrigation ruins the land too. The courses were good.

However, there is only one position in this course to be filled from each community, and Don Gregorio's son has been elected by the *sindicato* to attend. One woman said to me, 'The people who go to the courses, at the end they don't know anything. Because they send people who aren't interested. Because they send their son, their brother...' In some cases, only *dirigentes* are invited to attend courses, leading others to complain that they should be accessible to everyone. In any case, the person elected must be from an established and, to a certain extent, respected family within the community. Those who own land and are involved in the organisational structures of their community have a wider variety of avenues for accessing information from beyond immediate interpersonal networks. Benjamin, excluded from the *sindicato* and therefore from the extension course, must put his fragile stock of social capital to work (du Toit et al. 2007:533) in order to access that information via word of mouth from someone like Don Gregorio. In some ways, this is a manifestation of and a reaffirmation of his relationship of relative dependence on his landlords (see Chapter Three), that can be likened to the historical patron-client relationship that officially ended after the revolution of 1952 (du Toit et al. 2007:528; Spedding 1994:80-85; 2004:360; Spedding and Llanos 1999:158-159; Wolf 2001:179). The same could be said to occur when community members visit Don Alberto, the descendent of an *hacienda* landlord, who is able to provide agricultural and veterinary information from English-language books purchased during visits to the United States, and educational CD Roms purchased in La Paz. Unable to access this information directly, people look to Alberto as the gatekeeper to the global communicative ecosystem.

Let us return now to Lizet, to see how she is managing in her quest to obtain information that will help her to cure young Rafael. At the time of my fieldwork, Radio Yungas had no programme aimed specifically at health. Some NGOs sponsor radio spots informing on a specific topic, such as leishmaniasis or tuberculosis, but these are no help here.<sup>234</sup> So, Lizet goes in search of her community's RPS, a local person given basic health training according to an initiative by USAID-funded NGO *Servir*.<sup>235</sup> She seeks first of all that most intimate form of communication that is face-to-face communication, as she knows she will be able to engage in dialogue and ask questions of the health worker (cf. Valente and Saba 1998).<sup>236</sup> 'Ha viajado,' his wife tells Lizet. He has gone to La Paz to sell coca. In any case, Lizet knows that it is unlikely that he will have the necessary medicines. So she goes in search of the *brujo*, the witch doctor who lives up the hill. When she finds that he too has travelled, she waits until the weekend and then catches a ride into town to visit the hospital, where she joins the long queue of *campesinos* taking advantage of a journey to the market, to address an ailment.

Having taken the journey into town and shifted her geographical position within the communicative ecosystem, new avenues of information and new links to the global networks of which the Yungas is but a subsystem open up to Lizet (Appadurai 1996:41; Castells 2004:3). She could, for instance, pick up a newspaper to read. Newspapers are not delivered to the communities (cf. Beltrán 2006a:81), and the coca producers who choose to access them do so when they travel to La Paz to trade coca. Don Gregorio says, 'Those who travel to La Paz bring it back. They lend it to me. Each time I go to La Paz I also like to buy the newspaper on the way out and I spend the rest of the week reading it. The news is out of date, but at least I'm getting informed.' Those who stay behind must put their social capital to work to gain this access, as does Don Gregorio when he borrows a newspaper from a friend (cf. du Toit et al. 2007:533). However, Lizet does not pick up a newspaper. It would be an unnecessary cost for her and, in any case, she can receive her diet of news with much less effort by listening to the radio, not needing to test her neglected literacy skills, and being able to carry out her daily tasks at the same time. And besides, the newspaper does not tell her about the impending blockade, nor is it likely that she will find there a cure for her baby. As an in-coming and non-dialogic medium, it does not know or respond to her needs (cf. Beltrán 2006a:81; Contreras Baspineiro 2000b; Gumucio-Dagron 2004a).

She could also, but does not, visit the new telecentre to use the Internet. I will not repeat the many reasons as to why, (these are outlined on page 154), except to emphasise that it would not occur to

---

<sup>234</sup> One of the motivations for the creation of Radio Yungas in the 1970s is said to have been the need to inform people about tuberculosis, a disease from which many people were suffering at the time. A long-time staff member said, '...many people suffered from tuberculosis. There was a programme with *Claridad*, called "Santa Monica", in the Health Centre of Chulumani. That's why there was a need for radio.'

<sup>235</sup> Responsable Popular de Salud (Popular Health Representative). As part of this programme, elected representatives from each participating community are taught basic health and first aid, and are then given the responsibility of being in charge of health in their community. People from the community can then go to them if they have a health issue or need treatment.

<sup>236</sup> Valente and Saba (1998) have undertaken a study in Bolivia comparing the influence of mass media and interpersonal networks during a communication campaign centred around reproductive health. They found that the mass media influenced behaviour change in individuals whose personal networks included few contraceptive users, but not in individuals whose networks included a majority of users. This suggested to them that the mass media may provide a substitute for personal networks in influencing behaviour change.

her to enter because of the way in which the telecentre has inadvertently been set up by the implementing NGOs (see Chapters Six and Seven) as a place for non-agriculturalists (middle-upper, *mestizo/blancos*). With no active attempts to foster a sense of ownership over the project within the *campesino* population (cf. CRIS Bolivia 2003:39; Gumucio-Dagron 2003:4; 2004a:3-5; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006:xx; Slater and Tacchi 2004:75), the access divide is left to become more than just geographical, but also a division of labour, ethnicity and class (cf. Skuse and Cousins 2007:188). Of equal importance are issues of content relevance, since there is no guarantee that Lizet would, if she attempted to do so, find something on the Internet in a language that she could understand, that would assist her in curing her baby, and the same can be said for Benjamin if he were attempt to search for information on his pest (cf. Balaji et al. n.d.; Girard 2001; Gumucio-Dagron 2003; Gumucio-Dagron n.d.; ITU 2001; Warnock and Wickremasinghe 2005).

Having passed by the telecentre without a glance, Lizet does, however, stop to join the hoards of *campesino* visitors who gather outside Don Filemón's store until late at night taking advantage of the medium of television that is not so accessible during their everyday lives. Together they laugh at the comical Cholo Juanito, or are silently worried as they watch President Mesa's third and final resignation address. Don Filemón, a businessman from La Paz, enjoys the prestige associated with the large crowd that the small screen attracts, and knows it is he who ultimately has the power to elect the information that all these people will receive. With a flick of a button, he can change the channel or eject the DVD. Perhaps it is here too that the 'digital divide' manifests itself as a class and an ethnic divide, and that power relations inherited from *hacienda* times are reinvented and reaffirmed through access to global networks and the power to elect how that access is experienced (cf. Skuse and Cousins 2007:188).

Although access is differentiated, no one is excluded completely from the global networks (Castells 1996; 2004). Even Radio Yungas itself is a mediator for information that is received from various different sources from beyond the Yungas, carrying national ERBOL<sup>237</sup> broadcasts at certain times of the day, and with national and international news being collected from La Paz radio stations, from the various national television channels, from newspapers, and from the Internet when available.<sup>238</sup> Rather, it is the ability to choose what information is accessed and via which avenues, that may be diminished depending on a person's position within the coca *field*. People work accordingly to widen their opportunities for information access relative to the economic and social resources available to them.

---

<sup>237</sup> ERBOL (*Educación Radifónica de Bolivia*, Radio Education of Bolivia) is a national network of radio stations of which Radio Yungas is a member. See <http://www.erbol.com.bo/>.

<sup>238</sup> The Press team listen constantly to Panamericana, Fides and Illimani radio stations while they are preparing their news items, and a crisis ensues at the central radio office whenever the newspaper saleswoman neglects to reserve for the radio one of the few newspapers that arrive in Chulumani. While it was operational, staff made use of the Internet telecentre in Chulumani to search for information. After it closed down and NGO *Claridad's* telecentre was opened in Irupana, the *corresponsal* would search for news on the Internet, and then call this through to the central station in Chulumani via *cajita* so that it might be broadcast on the radio for a Yungas-wide audience.



## The Non-Producers: Accessing National and Global Informational Networks

It is a busy Saturday and Doña Teresa has been discussing baby cures with her *ahijada* Lizet, between customers. Lizet imparts to her the accumulated knowledge she has gained over the past few days; the eucalyptus, the orange juice, bat's blood, those pills from the Doctor. Teresa tries to remember what they said about this at the health workshop with *Crecer*. *Crecer* is an NGO that runs a micro-credit scheme in conjunction with health-oriented courses and financial education for women in Chulumani and some of the other towns.<sup>239</sup> The women meet with a coordinator from La Paz once a fortnight to make their loan repayments and discuss topics such as childbirth, family planning and nutrition. It was at *Crecer* that Teresa learnt, too late, about contraception. 'I didn't know. If I'd known, I would only have had two kids, and not so close together.' Many women cite these meetings as an important source of health information, but only when prompted, and Mariana wonders whether they really have much of an impact in terms of positive social change. 'There are some really closed-minded women,' she said. 'In the end, it ends in nothing. They just end up fighting.'<sup>240</sup>

Mariana was convinced by her friend Teresa to join up with the programme in Chulumani and describes how the meetings serve as a space of social interaction for the women, who cackle, chortle and argue throughout, much to the chagrin of the visiting coordinator (cf. Slater and Tacchi 2004).<sup>241</sup> 'It's fun,' says Mariana. She told me that 'everyone' was in *Crecer*, all the women of the town. 'Even Elizabeth', the owner of one of the town's hotels. 'As if she needs a loan!' However, 'all the women of the town,' does not include those who feel themselves to be excluded because of their economic or social position within the town. Teresa says of the meetings:

Not everyone goes. Not everyone can go, because you have to be a part, a member of that institution. You have to take out a loan with them. Not just anyone can go if they're not with the association, or if they haven't taken out a loan. Maybe there are people who don't think they will be able to get a loan, for whatever reason.

Lizet is one of those excluded women, as *Crecer* has decided to base its operations solely in the towns, thus creating a new differentiation of information access between producer and non-producer. Lizet and Teresa differ too in their television viewing habits, as discussed, for while Lizet

---

<sup>239</sup> *Crecer* is a Bolivian not for profit organisation founded in 1985 with the assistance of the international NGO Freedom from Hunger (FFH). See <http://www.creecer.org.bo/> and [http://www.microcreditsummary.org/papers/bblsp\\_appC.pdf](http://www.microcreditsummary.org/papers/bblsp_appC.pdf) for an example of a course module.

Many women find the scheme beneficial, but others complain that the interest on loans is too high. One woman said, 'It's not good. The interest is very high... It's not in our interests. I left – the interest is very high.'

<sup>240</sup> She told the story of one meeting in which the coordinator had shown the women a picture of two towns: one dirty and one clean. When the coordinator asked the women which town corresponded to Chulumani, someone replied, 'The dirty town. The other is Irupana.' Another woman said, 'Irupana is clean because there are no people – everyone goes to the *campo*, there are no tourists, there's no one to throw rubbish. Here, there's people. It has to be dirty.' The supervisor had suggested that since all the women lived in different parts of the town, whenever they saw a child throwing rubbish on the ground, they could tell them not to, and the town would become clean. 'I already do that,' Mariana told me. 'But if I say that to all the kids, they're going to say, 'Who does she think she is?' In the end they just ended up fighting, it ended up in nothing.' She said she also tries to encourage people to sweep the street, but no one is interested.

<sup>241</sup> Slater and Tacchi (2004:68-74) discuss in a similar way how ICT centres serve as important meeting places for women.

is able to catch a glimpse today on her way through town, Teresa has the television on all day in her shop, throughout the week.<sup>242</sup> Most Chulumaneños have a television set in their home or shop, and those temporary residents of Chulumani who find themselves without a well-established family unit to share meals with, may eat in one of the many *pensiones* (eateries) that have a news programme or the Simpsons showing during lunchtime. Included in this group are two extremes: professionals from La Paz doing a term in the country (at the hospital, in the Coop Society or with the local government), and children who have travelled alone from their communities to study at Chulumani's High School.<sup>243</sup>

Others may put their social capital to work and visit a friend when it is time to view a particular *telenovela*, as Mariana did after her mother left town with the television and before she had enlisted the services of the Coop Society to purchase a new one (cf. du Toit et al. 2007:533). But elderly Don Raúl pities those who must depend on others for their access to informational networks beyond the Yungas (Castells 1996; 2004). When travelling, he watches television at relatives' houses or at his lodgings, but in town he only watches television in his home. 'It's the only place where you can choose. In the street, you can't choose', he says.

Of course, he owes this luxury of choice in part to his position within the family; the youngest of his five children may not possess the same elective powers over the family's one small television set. As such, the political economy of access and ownership of information penetrates even to the most basic unit of society (cf. du Toit et al. 2007; Garnham 2006; Durham and Kellner 2006; Mosco 1996). While Raúl watches the television 'for sports and international information, for example about the elections in Iraq', his daughter may, after finishing her chores, disappear into the street in search of a television set that is showing the programme she wants to see. If it is *Velo de Novia*, the currently favourite Mexican *telenovela*, she will be in luck, for at nine o'clock every night, the majority of the televisions in the Chulumani region are synchronised to this channel, and when I stop by the store to ask Guadalupe if she has any honey to sell me, she passes me the honey and takes my coins without peeling her eyes from the screen, epitomising the concept of foregrounding (cf. Tufte 2005:57).<sup>244</sup> At a more opportune time, she says of herself and her husband:

We watch all the channels that have *novelas*. We're *noveleros*. Channel 13. From 2 to 4 we watch *novelas*. Then I turn it off because they just show cartoons, for children.

---

<sup>242</sup> The latest teledevelopment to reach Chulumani is cable television, brought to Chulumani by the Coop Society at US\$5 a month for Coop members and US\$7 for non-members. Despite the relatively high cost, 70 people had signed up even before the inauguration, which saw a live football match (the selling point) being shown on a large screen in the plaza. Fireworks were let off, masses of people appeared to watch the game, and more people succumbed to signing a contract. As this occurred only briefly before the end of my fieldwork period, I am unable to comment on how it may have altered the communicative ecosystem of the Yungas.

<sup>243</sup> Accordingly, some *pensiones* cater better for the first group (views of the valley, dessert), while those in the second group frequent those establishments that are less marketable in aspect for the upper classes (although by no means inferior in terms of the food). Parents whose children are living alone will often arrange and pay for their child to eat in the same *pensión* at the same time each day.

<sup>244</sup> Tufte (2001a:57) writes that the *telenovela* 'constitutes one of the most important cultural expressions within contemporary Latin American popular culture,' and that these programmes are watched by and are present in the lives of millions of Latin Americans, 'to a degree unseen in most other parts of the world' (ibid.).

After that, I turn it on for the news. Then we watch more *novelas*, once again the news, then there's another *novela* until 10 p.m.. Then we go to sleep.

When Teresa says, 'There's no fun here in Chulumani. Sometimes we watch TV to entertain ourselves', she describes only a small part of the role that this medium plays in her and others' lives, for television becomes for those who gather to watch it in their homes (amid children and chickens) or in the street (warily of passing wheelbarrows, trucks and dogs), both a 'social and participatory affair' (Miller 1995:216) and a way of allowing a wider (more glitzy, more comfortable) world to become a part of their own (cf. Appadurai 1996:7; Tufte 2001a:60; 2006:696).<sup>245</sup> *Telenovelas* and other programmes become social articulators, as the fictitious world of the soap opera is overlaid across the everyday happenings of the townsfolk, and the doings of the characters become fodder for the gossip circuit (Miller 1995; Spence 1995). Although both the world of the Mexican *telenovela* and the 'real life' of the stars behind it represent a world of glitzy urban wealth that is so far removed from Yungas life as to be safe from any real confusion or too much self-identification, people nonetheless take seriously those messages and Catholic moral values that the *novelas* transmit concerning marriage, men and women, rich and poor, good and bad, and mediate them in a way in which they will become recognisable and useful in their own lives (Kim 2005; Lopez 1995; Martín-Barbero 1995; 2002; Tufte 2001b:39). 'It's to teach us that there are bad people who can do things like that to us', said Mariana after seeing how the good (poor) Andrea had been drugged and raped. The social influence of the *telenovela* cannot be underestimated, as can be attested to by at least two infants who roamed the town sporting the names of popular *telenovela* actresses during the time of my fieldwork (cf. Miller 1995:224; Tufte 2001b:39).<sup>246</sup>

The popularity of television is complemented by the unpopularity of print media.<sup>247</sup> Newspapers arrive in town toward the end of the day, by which time anything of interest has already been seen on television or heard on the radio, making it the medium with the longest time-delay, and redundant for most people. As a written text, it demands foregrounding to an extent greater even

---

<sup>245</sup> Tufte (2006:696) writes that the potential for social mobility of the main female character is a common theme within Latin American *telenovelas*, so that women from low-income situations identify with the character's quest to achieve an easier life and the modern consumer commodities that are thought to accompany this (cf. Tufte 2001a:60).

<sup>246</sup> See Miller (1995:224) on the desire among soap opera viewers in Trinidad to emulate television characters with whom they identify, in this case through clothing, jewellery and make-up. Tufte (2001b:39) writes that strong socio-emotional bonds are created between the fictional characters of Latin American *telenovelas* and their audiences. However, the characters he writes of (particularly those of Brazilian *telenovelas*) are 'relevant' for their (eg. Brazilian) audiences, and 'perform recognisable dramas from everyday life' (ibid.). This is not the case for the Yungueño *telenovela* viewers, since Bolivia's *telenovela* industry is all but non-existent, and the lives that they see played out on their screens are far removed from their own. He later makes the point that although the *telenovelas* 'portray a material world that is often far removed from the viewers' own lives', viewers nonetheless are able to identify certain everyday experiences undergone by the characters as being similar to their own predicament, and thus they are able to feel a sense of identification and cultural membership, counterbalancing to some extent the feelings of marginalization they experience as 'low income citizens of the world' (Tufte 2006:697). Comparisons can be drawn with radio serials. Murdock (1981:156) has written that listeners of radio serials may be 'active rather than passive, participants rather than dupes,' but, 'Even so, it is activity that remains confined by the limits set by the imaginative and ideological world presented by the serials...' He writes that although listeners surveyed in 1940s Britain were mainly working class, the radio serials focused on portraying the doings and attitudes of the upper classes. The result was a powerful downward transmission of dominant views and assumptions (ibid.). The same would seem to be the case in the Yungas with regard to *telenovelas*.

<sup>247</sup> Aside from newspapers and leaflets, this category includes the books in the two town libraries, which are somewhat barren. One library is run by the Municipality and the other by Radio Yungas. Both rely to a large extent on donations and have few recent titles.

than the television, whose visual element can at least be briefly foregone whilst one tends to a customer or sweeps the floor. In addition, there is the matter of literacy already discussed. While Raúl tells how reading a newspaper is a 'passion' for him, and that he has always loved to read, it is women, and especially women from poorer families, who are more likely to be excluded from the use of this medium because of their low levels of literacy; again, an illustration of the gendered divisions of cultural capital investment that are a disposition of the habitus of both *campo* and *pueblo* (Bourdieu 1977:87). 'That's all I understand,' Doña Betina says, pointing to the pictures of the newspaper that I have just purchased from Carlo, and then, pointing to the words, 'That, I can't. They didn't teach me to read. My Dad didn't send me to school. "What for?" he used to say. I never learnt. How I would like to read – it must be lovely.'<sup>248</sup>

Teresa does not read the newspaper, but her husband Ramón is a strong advocate for the information leaflets that are sometimes distributed by the government or NGOs informing on specific topics, such as the Referendum that was held in Bolivia in 2004 to decide the fate of the country's hydrocarbon reserves. However, these would not have been of much use to Betina, nor to Don Raúl who, much to his despair, can no longer read easily due to his failing eye-sight. They were no use either to eighty-five year old Doña Carmen, who frets as she recounts a dream in which she grew wings and flew up to heaven where God told her that it was not her time and that she should return immediately to earth and read the Bible. 'But I can't read,' she told him in the dream. When it was her turn to vote in the Referendum, the nice boy at the voting booth helped her by showing her which boxes to tick. Generally, it is those from families best positioned within the coca *field*, whose parents invested the most cultural (and therefore economic) capital in their education, who are most likely to find both ease and relevance in reading a newspaper or other print material.

Ramón, keen to invest as much as possible in his three boys, sends them to one of the Internet courses held in the telecentre before its closure. He is not so much interested in their being able to access immediate global networks of information and knowledge, but hopes that the cultural capital they gain here in the form of computing skills, will be convertible to economic capital in a future that resides beyond the Yungas and beyond the coca 'field', in both senses of the word. At the time I undertook my fieldwork, the Internet was not used as an information resource except where school students asked by the teacher to investigate a certain topic would locate and print off an essay to hand up unedited, perhaps copied out in their own handwriting. In such cases, the relationship between the students and the wider communicative ecosystem was one in which the students were largely subordinated to those external and unidirectionally in-coming sources, receiving information as the largely passive receivers in a 'hypodermic' sender-receiver model (cf. Castells 1996:470; 2004:3; Contreras Baspineiro 2000b:36-37; Lerner 1958; 1967; Morley 1992:45; Schramm 1967; Sassen 1999; see Chapter Six).

---

<sup>248</sup> Studies claim that literacy is relatively high in the Yungas. Sanchez (2005:23) places it at 90%, based on a study carried out by CIES International and funded by USAID. However, a person classified as literate may not necessarily have a sufficient level to warrant the effort made to read a newspaper or a book.

Ramón and Teresa, in their mid-thirties and self-professedly too old and comfortable to study, have no need anyway to be linking to a vast global information network, and are content to leave the Internet to the younger generation. They receive most of the information they need from the television and the radio, and it is the latter with which I will end the discussion. Like other townsfolk, they listen to a wide variety of radio stations, with Radio Yungas, the 'radio of the *campesinos*,' only one in this melée.<sup>249</sup> It would be forgivable to think that people from the town did not listen to Radio Yungas at all, because of the detachment with which they speak about it. Gonzalo, a young man from Chulumani, often post-scripts his discussion of what he heard on Radio Yungas with, 'I just happened to be listening to it by accident.' While another young couple of agronomists explain:

Fides is the best because it's reliable in its information, in its education. Now for example, they're informing a lot about the Referendum. There are lots of educational programmes. Radio Yungas bores us. They go over and over the same issues. In Fides, they explain and educate. They invite people to speak about various topics... They educate you about topics like the gas, the Referendum.

But Radio Yungas has a way of permeating social spaces that appear closed to it, and crossing social boundaries at certain times. Townsfolk turn to Radio Yungas either when television reception is interrupted or when 'something is happening' in their immediate social world (not in Iraq and not in the glitz and ritz of the *telenovela*): when something is happening that threatens to affect them directly, or to potentially unbalance their social or economic equilibrium.<sup>250</sup> This occurs when the government makes a threat against coca, or when a blockade or march is being planned or underway that directly involves the Yungueños and which they know will be reported in detail only on Radio Yungas (cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:33).<sup>251</sup> Here, the common need for a particular brand of information necessitates a dissolving of those social divisions that include and exclude from certain 'loops of information and communication flows' at other times (Lash 2002:75). Then, the productive work begins of creating a Yungueño identity, rallied around the focal point of this ecology of coca communications, in opposition to a common foe (Featherstone 1995:112). Horst and Miller (2006) write that communication is about more than function and coping. Indeed, it is also about creating and contesting discourses, meanings and identities. This will form the basis of the final discussion of the chapter.

---

<sup>249</sup> People in the town listen to a variety of local and La Paz-based stations, including Radio Yungas, Frecuencia Yungueña, Infinita from Irupana, Siglo 20 from Huancané, and from La Paz, Radio Fides, Panamericana and Cruz del Sur, among others. Frecuencia Yungueña was a small radio station that operated in Chulumani with equipment donated by Argentinian Evangelical brothers, although the local Pastor had seen the need to diversify from religious programming in order for the station to be financially viable. As it was, the station had difficulty sustaining itself in competition with Radio Yungas, and was set to close by the time my fieldwork ended. By this time, the Coop Society had opened up its own radio.

<sup>250</sup> Oddly enough, these two events (interrupted reception and 'something happening') often seem to coincide, leading to speculation that either the government has tampered with the reception, or the young manager of Chulumani's local television station has done so, moving the antenna so that his station might be the only one to broadcast images from the site of the blockade.

<sup>251</sup> Gumucio-Dagron (2001a:33) writes similarly of the miners' radio stations: 'In times of political upheaval the union radio stations would become the only trustworthy source of information. As the military captured newspapers, radio and TV stations in the capital and other cities, the only information available would come from the miner's (sic.) radio stations.'

## Communications Media as Sites of Struggle over Control of Material and Cultural Production

As outlined initially, media within the ecosystem of coca communications can serve three 'experience-distant' functions. We have dealt with the first two: facilitating the maintenance and extension of existing social networks, and facilitating access to information networks from beyond those existing networks. I will now briefly address the final function: providing a space for actors to exert influence in the struggle over the production of discourse, values and meanings that has historically accompanied and continues to accompany the struggle over material resources (see Chapter Two). Communications media have long been used as a platform for these struggles and certain non-local media are seen by some Yungueños to be unidirectional transporters of a type of cultural artefact that aims to undermine both the culture and the autonomy of the local people (cf. Beltrán 2006b; García Canclini 1987; Huesca 1995; Martín-Barbero 1997; Mattelart 1983; O'Connor 1990).<sup>252</sup> Such a sentiment can be identified in this quote by one elderly man, which I shall revisit from the previous chapter:

We, the Aymara and Quechua people are respectful people. Rape and so on has been learnt from high society, from *telenovelas*, from television.

In Latin America in particular, communications scholars have long argued for a balancing in the international flow of information, which was thought to be heavily one-way; from 'north' to 'south'. A 'New International Information Order' (Beltrán 2006b:157) was advocated as an antidote to the mass media that acted as an apparatus for the incorporation of developing countries and local cultures into a world system aimed at the diffusion of industrial technology and a free market society (Fals Borda 2003; Freire 1972; MacBride 1980; Martín-Barbero 1982; 2002; Mattelart 1979; 1983). It is local participatory media that have provided local people with a space in which to work toward redressing some of these inequalities (cf. Contreras Baspineiro 2000b:34; Gumucio-Dagron 2001a), through asserting the ability to construct counter-discourses of the local reality and of the local identity. One woman identified this when she replied to the man quoted above:

We can't distance ourselves from technology. We have to speak with high society, with those who use ties, with blacks, with whites... I can't speak to you if I'm not educated. You know the laws, I don't know the laws. We have to educate ourselves. ... the government wants us to stay the same, that we won't become educated – the TV, the radio, they put it on so that we are put to sleep. We need education.

---

<sup>252</sup> O'Connor (1990:107) writes how in 1974, during General Banzer's time in power, the State distributed 5000 television sets with easy payment terms through COMIBOL, the State mining company, with the aim of undercutting the effectiveness of the politically active miners' radio stations. See also Huesca (1995:159), who reports the view among miners' radio practitioners that movies and television have 'wiped out the essence' of the district and the memory of the miners' movement.



She is suggesting that while certain media may currently be tools of the government to create a discourse that is not favourable for local people, it is these same media that will provide a space via which local people might work to produce a counter-discourse and to redress some of the historical inequalities and injustices discussed previously. Ricardo, retired journalist who presents a programme as a volunteer on Frecuencia Yungueña, does just this when he announces one day on his programme the decision to cease the broadcasting of foreign music:

We are no longer going to play music in English. No more North American music, because we are an indigenous country and we have to appreciate what is ours... The young people have to listen only to music from our country. The young people have to like our music. In the United States they don't listen to any of our music, so why should we listen to music from over there? So, no more of this music in English that nobody understands.

There is only one medium that permits this kind of proactive communication on the part of local people. Radio, and in particular Radio Yungas, is the only medium that permits 'out-going' transmission, in that messages from within the Yungas can be broadcast by local people to a wide region. As an oral/aural medium which is portable, backgroundable and negligibly costly, it is accessible for both speakers and listeners, and hence able to be adopted for the work of fomenting a united Yungueño or *cocalero* identity. The listeners and participants, together with the staff, become the 'Radio Yungas family', an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983; cf. Allison 2007) with an identity constructed in opposition to an enemy that is common to all those who form a part of the ecosystem of coca communications and who cohere around the coca leaf as material livelihood and cultural symbol (cf. Featherstone 1995:112). The following speaker uses a participatory programme, *Contacto*, to call the different sectors of the Yungas together in this way after an unsuccessful mobilisation against the government:

Here, what was missing is our own sacrifice, that of the comrades, producers of the coca leaf. If the two institutions had connected – catechists of Nor and Sur Yungas – we would have achieved our objective... The news would have gone out on a global level that this time yes, the Yungueñan brothers and sisters had made ourselves felt... Thank you to the teachers who observed the strike and for supporting us, the coca producers. Thank you to the fifty percent who stayed in the communities for observing the strike and maintaining a constant vigil.

As will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, it is actors who occupy certain positions within the ecosystem of coca communications, in particular *dirigentes*, who utilise the radio for this form of communication (cf. Alfaro 2006b; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006).<sup>253</sup> However, as a group, the coca producers are able to make use of the relative autonomy they have in terms of the coca trade, and the economic surplus that is a product of the control they have over coca

---

<sup>253</sup> See Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte (2006: xxxiv-v) and Alfaro (2006b) on the role that unequal power relations play in impeding some groups from gaining access to and participating in the public sphere.

production, to fuel the radio station and to dominate the media space that is Radio Yungas, thereby contributing most heavily to the creation of discourse and meaning on its airwaves.<sup>254</sup> Further discussion of this will be reserved for the following chapter, which is dedicated to Radio Yungas.

## Conclusion

The ecosystem of coca communications, a small sub-system within the global communicative ecosystem that connects Wawa Kuka to La Paz to Washington to Vienna, works as an expression and articulation of the coca production system of the Yungas. Within it, individuals, families and groups use a combination of older and newer communications media to work, first of all, to achieve their 'near-experience' goals (Geertz 1989) of conversing with distant loved ones, of organising business transactions and undertaking the everyday work of securing and protecting livelihood (cf. du Toit et al. 2007; Horst and Miller 2006; Skuse and Cousins 2007). Secondly, they further seek to fulfil their information needs in terms of national and international events, health and agriculture, looking to networks beyond their existing interpersonal networks, where these are unable to provide the required information. Thirdly, they seek to inform and influence public opinion, with an expressed intention to redress power imbalances and injustices with regards to the control of both material and cultural production, that they see as having characterised and continuing to characterise insider-outsider relations throughout history. Expressed in 'experience-distant' terms, people look to maintain and extend existing social networks, and in so doing to protect and accumulate capital of the various types, and most fundamentally, economic capital. They look to further secure their livelihood and wellbeing by connecting to geographically or socially distant informational networks, and finally they look to contribute to the cultural production that results in the discourses, meanings and values that surround coca and coca growers.

Within the ecosystem of coca communications, there exist patterns of exclusion and inclusion where individuals, families and groups have differential access to different communications media and ICTs because of the specific natures of the particular media on the one hand, coupled on the other with the place that those people or groups occupy within the coca production system in terms of productive, exchange and consumptive practices of both material and cultural resources (cf. Garnham 2006; Durham and Kellner 2006; Mosco 1996). These last two come together in the notion of a Bourdieusian coca *field* (Bourdieu 1984), in which people and groups are differentiated in terms of the capital they possess, and their habitus. Here, the division that is most clearly perceptible and therefore reproducible, is that between the two 'thought categories' (Barnes 1954) of coca-producer and non-producer (*campesino/mestizo* or *blanco, campo/pueblo*), whose

---

<sup>254</sup> See Girard (1992:157-178) on the use of radio for the development of national identity, the fostering of cultural diversity, and the promotion of alternative cultural material. See also Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte (2006:xxxii-iii) on social movements and the work of identity formation through communications media, and Rodriguez (2002) and Rennie (2002) on 'citizens' media', a concept defined by its potential to empower people as they reclaim their own media and 'disrupt established power relationships and cultural codes', shaping as they do so, their symbolic and material world (Rodriguez 2002:79). See also DfiD (2004:18) on community radio for democratisation.

separate habitus direct starkly separate practices in terms not only of labour, but also dress, accent, mannerisms, and, among other things, use of media communications.

The political economy of access then, is divided along class and ethnic 'thought' lines. To achieve the first goal of maintaining contact with family and friends, coca producers are more likely to use face-to-face communication and the radio, as these are readily accessible to them. The radio is portable (cf. Crisell 1986:215; Spitulink 2002:339), inexpensive to use, retains the speech aspect of intimate face-to-face communication (Ricoeur 1991), and can be both broadcast or 'false narrowcast' (cf. Becker 2006; Hirst and Harrison 2007; Naficy 1998; Sterne 2005). Non-producers are more likely to make use of the telephone, and for a select group, the Internet, for the same purposes, because they are more easily able to access these non-portable media in the town. The telephone also retains the speech aspect of face-to-face communication, and has the added advantage that personal information does not need to be broadcast into a public space. Internet achieves the same purposes of dialogic or near-dialogic communication, but loses the aspect of speech, and requires literacy and computing skills, restricting use of this medium mainly to school students (cf. Kellner 2002).

For accessing information from wider networks, producers are once again most likely to listen to the radio, because it is able to be backgrounded to daily labour tasks, and because the information broadcast is more likely to be locally relevant. They may also access NGO-run courses, where available. Townsfolk, on the other hand, spend more time watching television, because their daily tasks permit a higher level of foregrounding, as demanded by the television, or in some cases reading the newspaper. The latter is less popular than television, as it requires literacy skills to be practised, messages are delayed, and it requires an immediate investment of economic capital. Whilst there is differentiation within the system, no one is entirely excluded from the global networks of information exchange (Castells 1996; 2004; Lash 2002:75), for each person puts their economic and social resources to work to access a combination of communications media that will best facilitate the fulfilment of their communication needs (du Toit et al. 2007).

The only medium that can be employed in honour of the third function, of allowing local people to contribute to the production of discourse and meaning on a broad and overt scale, is Radio Yungas. Unique in the ecosystem, it permits a type of communication that is a combination of 'out-going', dialogic and broadcasting, so that local people can transmit messages to a vast area, and work to influence public opinion, more or less successfully depending on the capital they possess, and their skill in converting economic to symbolic capital (see Chapter Three). The radio is further unique in that it is able to enter simultaneously into places other media do not penetrate, appearing momentarily to blur social boundaries. This occurs when disparate groups are brought together in the face of a common opposition (Featherstone 1995:112); when the material and cultural struggles over coca and over those who form a part of the ecosystem of coca communication are

brought to the fore, and *campesinos* and townsfolk alike tune their dials to capture the breaking news that will only be heard on Radio Yungas.



5 RADIO YUNGAS: SOCIAL NETWORKER AND PLATFORM FOR CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND CONTESTATION



**FIGURE 20:** Radio Yungas Central Office, Chulumani. (Photo by author, June 2005).



...radio is one-sided when it should be two. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him. On this principle the radio should step out of the supply business and organise its listeners as suppliers.

(Bertholt Brecht 2006[1927]:2)

In the harvest, at work, from the time we wake up. Together with us it sunbakes with us, and if it starts to rain, it gets wet too. If it falls to the ground, it keeps talking.

(Coca producer, Chulumani community)

Radio Yungas is culture, is law. There is nothing else.

(Radio Yungas Director)

## Introduction

It is two minutes before eight in the morning and the *k'ichiri* are at work, carefully, deftly pinching the leaves from the coca bushes. Their banter, the song of a small bird that has nested in a coca bush, and the chatter of the radio (how to recognise tuberculosis) form a part of the soundscape of the coca field. Across the valley in a small room overlooking a football field, someone speaks into a two-way radio trying to contact the central office with an urgent message to be read on the hour.

At two minutes before eight, a man arrives at an office in La Paz wearing a suit. Today he will announce at a meeting the decision he has just made to appoint a new director to Chulumani's Radio Yungas. He is pleased with this decision. As he steps through the door and greets the secretary, a young woman in Chulumani types wildly on an ancient typewriter, trying to complete her news articles to be read on the hour. 'Secretaría, secretaria, hola, hola...' crackles the radio *cajita* next to her. She picks up the receiver. 'Secretaría. Can you please wait five minutes?'

Outside the office, a group of male *dirigentes* are queuing with silent, patient concern, ready to discuss something serious on the participatory programme, *Contacto*. Two rooms over, Rudy scours the national newspapers for anything that might be of interest in the Yungas and Gerardo is just opening up the radio's library, hassled by two young girls who urgently need to consult a book for their homework, due at 9 a.m. Downstairs, a woman from La Asunta is dictating a message to the receptionist; her sister must do what they agreed immediately if she knows what is good for her, and Roberto is already roaming the town with his tape-recorder, trying to track down the Mayor to answer to an allegation.

'Rebeca, news!!!' shouts Eduardo, grinning and leaning on a broom as he peers his head through the door of the small office. 'Now!' She tears the unfinished news item from the typewriter. 'Put an advert on!' she tells him, but the rousing news theme music is already playing. Like a whirlwind she flies past the *dirigentes* and into the broadcast studio, ('Secretaria, es urgente...' whines the radio). She sits down, positions the microphone, takes a deep breath in and, 'Good morning! This is Radio Yungas, from the Yungas of La Paz, for the country and the world!'

The particular nature of Radio Yungas makes it a unique organism within the ecosystem of coca communications. As discussed in the previous chapter (see Table 1, pages 136-137), costs for both listening and participating are negligible, and costs for running the radio station are minimal compared to other media, so that with the exception of the Director's salary, the station is able to be financed entirely by the sale of air-time to participants and advertisers (cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:15-16). This has obvious implications for community influence. Further, as discussed, spatial positioning requirements for both listeners and participants are minimal. This means that from the point of view of the listener, its portability allows it to filter into the soundscape of everyday activities

(Tacchi 1998; 2002a), so that it is readily accessible as a source of in-coming information.<sup>255</sup> This, together with the fact that it is an oral/aural, and not a visual medium, allows it to be backgrounded to daily activities, meaning that it can be listened to all day long (Tacchi 1998; 2000; Scannell 1991; Spitulnik 2002), and the fact that it does not require literacy makes it accessible to many people who would otherwise be excluded for this reason.

From the point of view of the potential participant, the *cajita* system discussed in Chapter Four (this will be described in further detail below) makes it accessible for people in the communities, as they do not need to travel far to transmit their own 'out-going' messages. The implication is that message direction flow is both in-coming (from sources external and internal to the Yungas), and 'out-going' (from sources within the Yungas, to the wide region that corresponds to Radio Yungas coverage, including most of the Yungas, and some sections of neighbouring provinces), and also dialogical, in that participants and presenters can converse in real-time on participatory programmes, or with a time-delay where participants leave messages and are responded to at a later time. As well as allowing participants to 'false narrowcast', meaning that they are able to broadcast a personal message with a narrow target audience (see Chapter Four; cf. Becker 2006; Hirst and Harrison 2007; Naficy 1998; Sterne 2005), facilitating the extension across distance of the everyday interaction that occurs between already existing social networks (Skuse and Cousins 2007), this is the only medium that allows local people to broadcast their messages to a wide audience.

Because of all of these factors - its physical and economic accessibility, its wide broadcast reach and the fact that it can become a part of daily productive and communicative activities – Radio Yungas is compatible with the coca production system in a way that makes it the medium most intrinsic to the ecosystem of coca communications. It is instrumental in linking geographically dispersed communities within the Yungas, as well as connecting the Yungas to the global communicative ecosystem by forming connections between the coca fields and those distant parts of the world where daily events affect Yungas residents in one way or another (cf. Appadurai 1996; Castells 1996; 2004; Lash 2002). This means that it has a high relevance value for the majority of coca producers. It also makes it a particularly important and strategic medium for various social actors, and a highly contested one, as different social groups from within and without the Yungas vie to influence the dominant discourse through the airwaves of the ecosystem (Foucault 1972).

This chapter will look at the way in which different actors, who include the Catholic Church as caretakers of the radio and the NGO responsible for its administration (*Claridad*), the paid staff members, the community members elected as *corresponsales* (correspondents, whose role it is to

---

<sup>255</sup> See page 32 on soundscape. See also Schafer (1977), Feld (1990), Westerkamp (1994), Corbin (1998), Tacchi (1998; 2000; 2002a) and Thompson (2002) on the concept of soundscape. Westerkamp (1994) also uses the term 'acoustic ecology' to describe the 'balance between sound and silence, between listening and soundmaking' (ibid.:93).

be in charge of the *cajita*),<sup>256</sup> the coca producers and non-producers, and other organisations that constitute outsiders to the coca production system, have differential access to the medium and various aspects of its use. The relations of cultural production that are manifested through the various actors' ownership (both legal and symbolic) of the radio station, their access to and authority to use the radio in certain ways to achieve their goals, as well as their effectiveness in influencing cultural production through participation on the radio, through the making of decisions on broadcasting and through the mediation and exchange of what has been broadcast, is dependent in large part upon the position that those players occupy within the relations of material (coca) production. In other words, people's capacities to use the medium of radio for certain purposes and to influence discourse depends upon their position and the amount of capital that they have within the coca *field* (Bourdieu 1984), whether coca producers or non-producers, insiders or outsiders to the coca production system, and dependent upon their situation in terms of land ownership, labour, participation in syndical and political organisations and participation in exchange practices and travel. All of this defines them, as already discussed, in terms of class and ethnicity, since the labour division between producer and non-producer also translates to the 'thought divisions' (Barnes 1954:45) between lower and middle/upper class, and between *campesino* and *mestizo/blanco* (Heath 1973; Rivera 1994; Soux de Wayar n.d.; Spedding 1994). The concept of communicative ecology then, may be complemented by a political economy approach, which allows us to pay attention to issues of differentiated power and access, and where a political economy of communication is 'the study of social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources' (Mosco 1996:25; see Chapter One).<sup>257</sup>

Being a successful player within the coca *field* requires that, accompanying the 'near-experience' pragmatic motivations of the everyday (Geertz 1989; Wikan 1991) is the constant 'experience-distant' work of protecting and accumulating capital in order to maintain or better one's position within the *field* (Bourdieu 1986; see Chapters One and Three for a discussion of the different forms of capital), and correspondingly, the ability to do so depends on the capital already possessed. So, having entered the coca *field* as outsiders, NGO *Claridad* and other organisations work to convert the cultural and economic capital they bring from outside the *field* to symbolic capital within the *field*, which will facilitate their influencing cultural production and discourse in line with their interests. Those employed full-time in the central office find themselves in a liminal position both materially and culturally in the coca *field* (Turner 1969), having shifted their labour activities from coca-producer to non-producer and yet having to represent and identify with those producers who are their listeners and who they have abandoned in labour, and hence, ethnic terms. They work to maintain and strengthen their social networks (social capital) and build their skills and knowledge

---

<sup>256</sup> *Corresponsales* are community reporters elected by the *sindicato* to be in charge of the radio *cajita* and to receive payment for messages and song requests to be broadcast on the radio, of which they receive a 20% cut. The remainder is used to finance the running costs of the radio station.

<sup>257</sup> See Chapter One for a more detailed discussion of the political economy of communication. See also Garnham (2006); Golding and Murdock (1996); Graham (n.d.); Hirst and Harrison (2007); Mansell (2004); Mattelart (1979); Mattelart and Mattelart (1998); and Wasko (2004).

(cultural capital) and thereby their recognition and prestige (symbolic capital) within this *field* through the production of discourse and meaning over the airwaves. The *corresponsales*, whilst retaining their status as coca-growers, find themselves in a similar situation, having to strategically negotiate between the interests of the listeners and the radio staff and administrators. They have less opportunity to use the airwaves to their advantage than do the staff members.

The listeners, who may also be narrowcasters and broadcasters, hence listener-narrowcaster-broadcaster, use the radio for three purposes, as discussed in the previous chapter. Firstly, in combination with other communicative media, they employ the radio as a tool for maintaining communication with existing social networks for reasons of emotional attachment to kin and friends, as well as for the maintenance of livelihood and economic capital (cf. Baym 2002; du Toit et al. 2007; Horst and Miller 2006; Skuse and Cousins 2007). Messages are directed to specific people or groups for this purpose, and as such can be thought of as ‘false narrowcasting’ (cf. Hirst and Harrison 2007; Sterne 2005). Secondly, people use the radio to access in-coming information from beyond their immediate interpersonal networks. As I dealt with these two purposes to some extent in the preceding chapter, I will focus here mainly on the final one, which is employed by only a select group. That is the work of exerting influence over the construction, maintenance and restructuring of discourses and cultural identities (cf. Qhana 1986), and is made possible due to the fact that Radio Yungas allows for local people to broadcast over a wide area, a claim that no other medium in the area can make.<sup>258</sup>

By becoming involved in the participatory programmes that provide a space for them to make their opinion known on a particular topic, people work to influence public opinion, more or less successfully depending on their existing position within the coca *field*, and their skill in converting the various forms of capital into symbolic capital. Due to their position, the people most often involved in these programmes are the *dirigentes*, and from their disparate vantage points, aided by Radio Yungas staff, these actors work to foment the creation of an ‘imagined community’ of listeners (Anderson 1983; cf. Moores 2000), a ‘Radio Yungas family’, who are united by their plight when placed in a wider world beyond the coca *field*.<sup>259</sup> Here, the struggle for the Yungueños becomes one not only over the mode of material (coca) production, but also over the mode of cultural production, as they work to redress the material and cultural inequalities that have characterised the historical relationship between local people and outsiders. And it is because coca growers exercise influence within the system of material production and generate an economic

---

<sup>258</sup> There are numerous examples of case studies where radio has been shown to be an important tool in the promotion or expression of cultural diversity (Chateau-Dégat 1992; Kidd 1992), in the construction of identity (Bosch 2003) and in the promotion of the political and social causes of disenfranchised groups (Gumucio-Dagron 2001a; Opoku-Mensah 2006; Radio Gazelle 1992; Tacchi 2002b).

<sup>259</sup> Moores (2000:2) is concerned with the role of the media in ‘articulating the private and the public, in providing links between the domestic sphere and various ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983) beyond the local situations of daily living.’ He gives the example of radio in Britain during the inter-war years, which gave listeners access to a “‘knowable” national community’ (Moores 2000:2).

surplus with which they are able to finance this radio station, that they also have a relative amount of influence over the discourse that is produced and sustained via the Radio Yungas airwaves.<sup>260</sup>

## Radio Yungas: A Brief History of a Brave Cultural Warrior

### The Political and Communicational Context of Radio Yungas' Birth

In 1978, the year of Radio Yungas' genesis, Bolivia's military dictators were at the height of a two-step in and out of power that would see the people endure another four coups before a return to tenuous democratic rule in 1982. With the chorus of military dictatorships, human rights abuses and civilian disappearances being echoed around Latin America at this time, it is not surprising that people in the region looked to community media, in particular radio, to fulfill a need for democratic and needs-based communication.

In line with the Latin American dependency theorists who argued that poor countries' 'underdevelopment' and poverty were the result of exploitation by wealthy countries and social inequalities within countries (Cardoso and Faletto 1979; Frank 1969; 1978; cf Chilcote and Johnson 1983; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006:xviii; Kay 1989; Larrain 1989), communication theorists such as Beltrán (2006a; 2006b), Mattelart (1979; 1983) and Martín-Barbero (1982; 2002) viewed the mass media as 'instrument(s) of cultural domination, especially in the direction of the *campo*' (Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas 1984:3). With reference to Albó (1981:31), Adalid Contreras Baspineiro, communication specialist and Director during my fieldwork of the NGO that administrates Radio Yungas, wrote, with Pérez Arenas:

The programming and the messages emitted are characterised by urban, consumerist and foreign, predominantly North American, content, which gives place to cultural alienation. The problems of the countryside and the actual reality of *campesino* life are put to one side and are not known about.

(Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas 1984:3)

This situation led theorists such as García Canclini (1980 cited Contreras Baspineiro 2000b:31) to call for a 'decolonisation of information', meaning a 'democratisation of the flows and processes of communication' and a shift toward horizontal, participative communication (Contreras Baspineiro

---

<sup>260</sup> See Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte (2006: xxxiv-xxxv), Forde et al. (2002), Alfaro (2006b) and Martín-Barbero (2006) on the role that unequal power relations play in impeding some groups from gaining access to and participating in the public sphere. See also Rodríguez (2002), Rennie (2002) and Tacchi (2002b; 2003) on 'citizens' media', a concept defined by its potential to empower people as they reclaim their own media and 'disrupt established power relationships and cultural codes', shaping as they do so, their symbolic and material world (Rodríguez 2002:79). Camacho Azurdu (2000) writes on the role of popular radio in the construction of citizenship in Bolivia.



2000:31-32). Radio communication had traditionally been unidirectional or vertical, with messages being sent from emitter to receptor (Brecht 2006; Beltrán 2006a; Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas 1984:3). The latter, whilst not necessarily a passive consumer (Servaes 2007; Spitulnik 2002), did not have the opportunity to use this medium for dialogic communication purposes. It was in this context that a host of participatory and community radio stations began to spring up that, according to Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte (2006:xviii), did not rely on any existing communication models, but grew out of experimental practice that responded to the needs of the community.

They may also, however, have found inspiration in the long and trailblazing experience of Bolivia's miners' radio stations, the first of which is said to date from 1947, making it among the world's first to experiment with what is now referred to as alternative or popular radio (Huesca 1995:152). Although Gumucio-Dagron (2001a:15) writes that Radio Pío XII, one of the better known stations, was established by Catholic Priests to 'fight communism and alcoholism', it soon became a vehicle through which to defend the political and social rights of workers. With the miners experiencing acute and persistent economic crises, Huesca (1995:152-153) believes that the appearance of the radio stations constituted an extension of centuries of struggle between miners and the oligarchy that controlled mining, and that it was a consciousness of the historical continuity of inequality that led directly to the drafting of a plan to construct the first miners' radio station (cf. Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas 1984:4). The restructuring imposed on the mining industry by the International Monetary Fund and other institutions may have further contributed to the struggle that was being enacted through alternative radio immediately following the Agrarian Revolution of 1952 (O'Connor 2004:2).

Whatever their initial purpose, the miners' radios paved the way toward a new paradigm based on the concept of communication as a bidirectional and horizontal flow where the emitter is also the receptor, and on a shift from the massive and commercial, to participatory processes involving the daily, local and community (Contreras Baspineiro 2000b:31-32; Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas 1984:4). Popular media, writes Camacho Azurduy (2000:29), become spaces of citizen participation, where they 'express all the voices and defend the diversity of languages and cultures, the right to be and to think differently, to have different tastes and aspirations; all of these, imperative for democracy' (cf. Rennie 2002; Rodriguez 2002; Tacchi 2002b; 2003). They aimed for radio to serve the function, as Bertolt Brecht had pleaded in 1927, of 'turning the audience not only into pupils but into teachers' (Brecht 2006:2; cf. Freire 1972).

It is interesting, however, to note that the miners were able to set up communicative apparatuses that served them, precisely because they were already a powerful and important group who, because of their role in the national economy, of which they were well aware, the government could not afford to ignore (Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:33-34; O'Connor 1990:104). Through the use of their social capital (workers were members of strong, politically active unions that were closely tied to the radio stations), their economic capital, the surplus of which, however meagre, they were able to

devote to funding the operations of the radio, and the symbolic capital they managed to accrue, they were able to create this medium and then use it to further advance their interests.<sup>261</sup> When economic and political change led to the closure of the mines during the 1980s, and the political influence of the miners fell away, so did these vibrant experiences of participatory radio (Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:35; O'Connor 1990:108).<sup>262</sup> A parallel can be drawn here with the coca growers who, as discussed, fund and sustain Radio Yungas through the economic surplus they draw from the production of coca. A political economy approach proves elucidating in this respect.

### **The Birth and Life of a Radio Station, Social Networker and Platform for Cultural Production and Contestation**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1978, the official inauguration of Radio Yungas was broadcast live across the region, interrupted only briefly due to a technical fault.<sup>263</sup> An unpublished document filed in the Radio Yungas library and entitled *Radio Yungas from the Inside*, proclaims, 'These (outages) were repeated on various subsequent occasions (including 4 months)' (Anonymous n.d.:1). The radio was an initiative of the Dutch Augustinian padres who had resided in the Yungas for many years and saw the radio initially as a way to facilitate the work of catechism in the area (Anonymous n.d.:1).<sup>264</sup> One Radio Yungas staff member who had worked with the radio since its inception said:

At the beginning, it was more to evangelise, to organise the catechists in the communities. Also, a lot of people suffered from tuberculosis. There was a programme with *Claridad* called 'Santa Monica', in the Health Centre in Chulumani. That's why there was a need for the radio.

In 1976, the radio began broadcasting experimentally from Lavi Grande, a remote hill-top above Irupana where its antenna stands to this day, the words 'Agriculture, training, culture, health, religion, education and development' inscribed upon it (Anonymous n.d.:1). It ceased broadcasting due to technical difficulties, however, and was inaugurated officially after being moved to the more central and populated area of Chulumani (Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas 1984:6). From the outset, the radio's ideologues characterised it as a medium for the 'voz de los sin voz' ('voice of

---

<sup>261</sup> Most of the stations were financed through monthly contributions from all workers, via union dues (Huesca 1995:152-153).

<sup>262</sup> When the cost of producing tin became higher than the international price, and mining ceased to be an important export industry, miners migrated in droves to the cities or other parts of the country (including the Yungas), and the radio stations began to close (Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:35). During this time of upheaval and migration, Pío XII broadcast information about relocated mining families, in order to maintain community ties (O'Connor 1990:108).

<sup>263</sup> The unpublished Radio Yungas document, *Radio Yungas Desde Dentro (Radio Yungas from the Inside)* (Anonymous n.d.:1), Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas (1984:6) and Felix Chambi Cari (1997:46) all claim that the inauguration occurred on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, while an ERBOL publication, *Radio Yugas: Impacto Popular!* records it as the 17<sup>th</sup> of July (ERBOL 1989:3).

<sup>264</sup> Gumucio-Dagron (2001a:15) notes that many of the most important alternative and participatory radio experiences in Latin America and elsewhere, have been instigated by Catholic priests. Founded in 1947, rural Colombia's *Radio Sutatenza* was perhaps the earliest of these. Gumucio-Dagron (2001a:15) writes, 'The Catholic priests behind these communication projects quickly understood that the survival and development of the radio stations had to be linked to community participation, involving the real social, political and cultural needs of the people, and not just preaching about faith or against communism.'

the voiceless'), and stated that its general objective was to be a 'democratic communications medium at the service of the *campesinos* and other popular sectors of the Yungas' (Anonymous n.d.:3). The Radio Yungas document reads:

The general objective of 1984 imagines Radio Yungas as a popular broadcasting station with a Christian vision, that affords permanent support to the natural and/or grassroots organisations of the Yungas region through concrete actions in the areas of communication and popular education.

(Anonymous n.d.:4)

In fact, the radio played an active role in the creation of grassroots organisations such as the Federation of *Campesinos* of Sud Yungas in 1978, and the Central of Agricultural Cooperatives of Sud Yungas (CECOASY) (Chambi Cari 1997:47), and also undertook work in leadership formation, through training programmes with young people (Chambi Cari 1997:89).<sup>265</sup> Amelia, who worked in the radio during its early days, says, 'The Priests installed the radio so that the people would wake up, to make people aware.' It was perhaps after 1985, with the arrival of the United Nations-funded Agroyungas project whose aim was crop substitution and to which the radio was explicitly opposed, that the radio's agenda turned more consciously toward the defence of the coca leaf (Chambi Cari 1997:53) and it is around this struggle that the discourse created through and in response to the radio is constructed and moderated today.

Radio Yungas quickly became a preferred medium among the *campesinos* because of the content of its programmes, which was largely local and regional in nature, and included agriculturally oriented information such as the price of coca and other products. (See Table 2 for a typical day of programming). It was also attractive due to the language used in broadcasting, with some programmes broadcast in Aymara, while the *castellano* used is the same popular language heard in the streets and fields of the Yungas.<sup>266</sup> Radio Yungas made the conscious decision to broadcast using 'lenguaje popular' ('popular language'), defined in a report presented by the radio at a regional workshop as 'that language with its own characteristics, with its turns of phrase, with its idioms, with its rude words. That language that not so long ago, was almost prohibited for radios, due to its "uncultured" character...' (ERBOL 1989:19).<sup>267</sup>

---

<sup>265</sup> Chambi Cari (1997) has written a Graduate thesis for La Paz's Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, entitled *Influence of Radio Yungas in the Regional Campesino Organisations: The Case of the Cocalero March of 1994*. It is one of the few studies to have focused on Radio Yungas.

<sup>266</sup> See Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte (2006:xx-xxi) on the importance of using appropriate language and content in communication projects.

<sup>267</sup> This is an ERBOL (*Educación Radiofónica de Bolivia*) document, presented at the 'First Regional Workshop on Communication and Pedagogical Development' at Hotel San Bartolomé, Chulumani (ERBOL 1989).

**TABLE 2: Radio Yungas Weekday Programming**

<b>Radio Yungas Weekday Programming</b>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Programme</b>	<b>Contents</b>
4:30 – 6:50 a.m.	<i>Wachu Comunicaciones</i> ('Wachu [coca terrace] Communications')	Conducted in Aymara 4:30-5 a.m. – Waking up music Historical themes Some listener participation 15 minutes of catechism from a designated community 5:40-6 a.m. – 'Kamasa': News in Aymara transmitted via national ERBOL network. 6 a.m.-6:10 a.m. – Local news
6:50 – 7 a.m.	Anuncios en directo (Live announcements)	<i>Corresponsales</i> call in from the communities with messages and announcements from community members, using the <i>cajita</i> .
7-8 a.m.	<i>Bolivia en Contacto</i> ('Bolivia in Contact')	News in <i>castellano</i> , transmitted via national ERBOL network
8 a.m.	<i>Dios en Nuestras Vidas</i> ('God in Our Lives')	Brief religious message from one of the padres of the Catholic parish of Chulumani, or one of the <i>hermanas</i> of the ICMY (Catholic Institute of Yungueña Women)
8 – 10 a.m.	<i>La Revista Contacto</i> ('Magazine: Contact')	Participatory programme dealing with the topics most important to listeners on that day. Most participants are <i>dirigentes</i> and deal with pressing political issues.
10:05 - 11:50 a.m.	<i>El Viajero</i> ('The Traveller')	Participatory programme broadcast from a booth at the entrance to Chulumani (the <i>tranca</i> ), a transport hub where trucks and buses arrive from all directions. Travellers use the radio to inform family of their whereabouts and when they can be expected to arrive at their destination.
11:50 – 12 p.m.	Anuncios en directo (Live announcements)	<i>Corresponsales</i> call in from the communities with messages and announcements from community members, using the <i>cajita</i> .
12 – 1 p.m.	<i>Chasqui Yungueño</i> ('Yungueño Messenger')	News hour. Predominantly local and national news. Some international news.
1 – 1:30 p.m.	<i>Visión Deportiva</i> ('Sporting Vision')	Sports programme – news and interviews
1:30 – 6 p.m.	<i>Felicitaciones en Familia</i> ('Family Greetings/ Congratulations')	Song request and greetings programme
6 – 7 p.m.	<i>Chasqui Vespertino</i> ('Evening Messenger')	Evening News programme
7 – 9:30 p.m.	<i>Akhulli</i> ('Coca break')	Conducted in Aymara. Agricultural information and participation.

The authors write:

... It is also a way of identifying the population with all its oral richness. It is a way of presenting the Yungas itself, with all its peculiar characteristics... A radio would do badly to be ignorant of that and try to incorporate into its broadcasts the so-called cultured language, which is more distanced from the Yungueño culture. Apart from that, its messages would be more difficult to understand. In synthesis, the popular language that is practised in the region is, for Radio Yungas, the cultured language. That lifts us up instead of diminishing us; it allows us to be a communications medium, to the service of education.

(ERBOL 1989:20-1)<sup>268</sup>

When I ask Monica, a coca-grower from a town near Irupana, why she listens to Radio Yungas, she replies, 'It's a local broadcaster. It informs us of everything. It also has music. Like Radio Yungas, there is no other.' Lizet simply casts me an odd glance and replies to the same question, 'Because it is the radio that we have.' Aside from the programming and the language, Radio Yungas facilitates participatory, horizontal communication of the type called for by Beltrán (2006b), Díaz Bordenave (2006b) and Freire (1972) through two innovative practices. One is the enlisting of *corresponsales*, community reporters who are elected by the *sindicato*. Their role will be discussed in a later section. The other is the use of radio *cajitas*, two-way radios which it is the role of the community *corresponsal* to manage. These *cajitas* can be used by the *corresponsal* to contact the Radio Yungas central office and to relay messages that community members wish to have broadcast on the radio, or they can be used by the *corresponsal* or any other community member to broadcast directly on the airwaves during participatory programmes or time-slots designated for live announcements. This allows people to maintain contact with family and friends without the trial and delay of physical travel (cf. Nair et al. 2006), as well as enabling those with the sufficient capital to be entitled to do so, to make their viewpoints known to a wide public, on topics of importance (cf. Alfaro 2006b; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006). Initially the radio provided *cajitas* to the most important towns, but now communities go to great lengths to raise the money to purchase a *cajita*, the cost of which is around \$USD 250-350. Alejandro, who has worked with the radio for many years and is now in charge of the press department, describes the changes that occurred with the introduction of the *cajitas* to the region:

There was no telephone, no transport, very little... So the Priests... they said, there must be a way that we can communicate with each other. So they got hold of this system of the *cajitas*... which they put in the most important towns, Irupana and Coripata – they had the first two *cajitas*. Just two... People had to go to the Municipality, to Irupana to leave their messages, to Coripata from their community to leave their messages, but at least it saved them something, didn't it? ... After that it grew every year.... now we have more than fifty... Now that it has worked, it's a more

---

<sup>268</sup> Recent changes to this policy are outlined in the following section.

comfortable medium for the people themselves. Now the people (the community) buy their *cajita*, they buy their radio. They realise that they save time, they save risk, they save everything, so people prefer to buy their *cajita*. That's what happened.

In illustration of the importance of the *cajita*, an inauguration ceremony is held when one is purchased and, if possible, Radio Yungas staff travel to the community to officially open the new office and to welcome the community as a new addition to the 'Radio Yungas family'. The celebration heralds the community's greater incorporation into the ecosystem of coca communications, and an end to what amounts to a certain level of exclusion from it. Isolated communities that can receive the Radio Yungas signal clamour to purchase a *cajita* and for relay transmitters to be installed so that they too might partake of the bi-directional communication that characterises this medium. Since its inception, Radio Yungas' coverage has grown to include most of the Yungas and even parts of some neighbouring provinces, including a small part of the capital, La Paz, meaning a potential listenership of over 100 thousand people (INE 2001). Radio Yungas has facilitated a connectivity of the ecosystem of coca communications and the people within it, in a way that no other medium to this day has been able to replace or reproduce. In the confident words of Radio Yungas' Director at the time, 'Radio Yungas is culture, is law. There is nothing else.'

After the withdrawal of the Dutch Augustinian padres from the area in 1994 (Chambi Cari 1997:92), the Bolivian padres who were placed in charge of the parish also assumed ownership of the radio station.<sup>269</sup> Having doubts about their own capacity to administer the radio, they enlisted the services of the NGO *Claridad*, which had worked for several years in the area, especially with coffee production and leadership building (Chambi Cari 1997:92). Initially, *Claridad* replaced the work of the Dutch padres in looking for funding for the on-going work of the radio. In 1996, however, the organisation announced that its role would henceforth be restricted to providing funding for the Director's salary, and that the radio would need to look for ways to become self-sufficient. Today, as the miners' radios did before them (Huesca 1995:152-153), the radio is able to cover its day-to-day costs, including the salaries of around 15 full-time staff, through the surplus that local people generate through their sale of coca and invest in the radio in the form of advertising and paid messages. *Claridad's* role is that of an over-seer, whose personnel appoint and pay the Director, audit the finances and ensure that the radio is operating according to their vision and policies.

---

<sup>269</sup> Chambi Cari (1997) writes on page 92 that the Augustinian padres withdrew from their religious mission and Bolivia in 1994, but on page 42 writes that they were in charge of the radio until the end of 1995. He does not give a reason for their withdrawal. When asking local people about the reasons for this withdrawal, I was usually told, 'They had been here a long time. They were tired.'



NOTE: This figure is included on page 186 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

**FIGURE 21: Map showing Radio Yungas' coverage** (from some years ago) (Reproduced from Qhana and Pastoral n.d.:39)

Radio Yungas grew up out of both an immediate need for people to facilitate the maintenance of their interpersonal networks across distance (cf. Skuse and Cousins 2007), and also of a more ideological vision of democratic participation in society as an antidote to external cultural domination. These two elements persist today within the life of the radio, as people use this communication tool to communicate with family and business partners, conducting their day-to-day business over the radio waves and working as such to protect their livelihoods or better their positions within the coca *field*, while at the same time the radio waves become a site where it is possible to nurture a Yungueño, and predominantly *cocalero*, identity, and through communication to convert their economic capital as a group to symbolic capital, thereby potentially shifting their position of power relative to other groups (Bourdieu 1986; 1990). I will now move on to discuss each of the different actors involved with Radio Yungas, beginning with the administrators.

## **The Administrator: Working with and within the Discourse**

### **Creating 'Spaces of Relative Autonomy' for the Production and Reproduction of Culture and Identity**

The Bolivian *padres* who inherited the role of official owners and overseers of the radio after the Dutch *padres*' withdrawal, relinquished the role of administrator to La Paz-based NGO *Claridad* and remain insecure about their own capacities to adequately fulfil the job. There has recently been discussion about whether *Claridad* should continue to administrate or whether the radio should come under the full administration of the Catholic Church. In a discussion with the Director of the radio, one *padre* agreed to write to *Claridad's* Director, asking for the organisation's continued administration of the radio. He said:

They tell us to administrate it, but there aren't any administrators in the Church. Or the ones that there are don't want to come to the *campo*... There are those who only want to be in the city, with their comforts. They don't want to come to a town like Chulumani. Those are the ones who know how to administrate.

Still the official owners, the *padres* today undertake little actual hands-on participation in the day-to-day running or decision-making of the radio. The Catholic Church certainly draws parameters for what can be broadcast and what cannot, just as it has influence in drawing the parameters of everyday life in the Yungas. One prominent man in the town has said, 'I'm vetoed by Radio Yungas. Well, I think so. I don't know, but they don't invite me, so I suppose they don't want me. Because I speak against the Catholic religion.' Yet, as illustrated by the fact that it is something that the man 'supposes' but can not prove, the parameters are drawn passively, and in relative silence, with the *padres* and *hermanas* (nuns) limiting their discursive contribution to the daily religious

reading each morning. While there is certainly much more to be said of the role that the Catholic Church as an institution plays in Radio Yungas broadcasting and as a part of the habitus (Bourdieu 1990) of Yungas people, I have chosen to leave aside this vast topic and to focus instead on the role of the administrating NGO *Claridad*.

*Claridad* appoint and pay the Director of the radio, audit the finances of the radio, and approve proposed programming. Self-denominated as a 'Centre of Popular Education,' *Claridad* has a vision for the radio that incorporates a long history of communications research among its staff, greatly influenced by ideas of dependency and of the media as 'instruments of cultural domination', as expressed by Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas (1984:3) in an audience survey conducted for Radio Yungas in 1983. Three years later, *Claridad* describe communication as playing an important role in 'preserving culture, reproducing essential elements of its structure as much as facilitating processes of change' (Qhana 1986:1).<sup>270</sup> They maintain that a group will best be able to produce, reproduce and maintain its cultural identity where on the one hand, there is an internal flow of information via which a culture may communicate with itself and thereby reproduce itself (ibid.:2), and where on the other, a space exists in which a culture may define itself in relationship to other cultures (ibid.).

They write, 'It is precisely within this hostile field where the relative autonomies are capable of reproducing themselves and becoming stronger' (Qhana 1986:2) and consider that it becomes the work of institutions such as *Claridad* to facilitate dominated groups' access to such 'platforms of confrontation' through their use of a combination of media (ibid.:7).<sup>271</sup> The continued desire to create such spaces of contestation can be identified today in *Claridad's* attempts to widen the reach of Radio Yungas, transporting Yungueño voices beyond the limits of the ecosystem of coca communications, so that Yungueños might communicate their cultural identity to a wider audience at the same time that they produce and reproduce it, thereby converting it into symbolic capital and power.<sup>272</sup> An example of this is the planned 'Yungueño network' (*Red Yungueña*), which aimed to use Internet technology to link a network of radio stations around the Yungas at the same time as providing a wider audience with access to the radio's broadcasts.<sup>273</sup> The new radio director appointed by *Claridad* shortly before my fieldwork ended, hoped that by harnessing the Internet, as well as coordinating to engage in live hook-ups with La Paz-based Radio *Claridad* and to transmit

---

<sup>270</sup> In the same document, *Claridad* write of an aggressive, 'national, statist, centralist society', and that 'the spaces of communication with hegemonic tendencies in Bolivia, correspond with the field of the statist and the private, which interbreed, intertwine and use each other mutually. This tendency toward hegemonic communication of those sectors, without doubt is linked to a political hegemony which uses all the potential of the media to which it has access to impose its project of domination' (Qhana 1986:2-3).

<sup>271</sup> In 1986, the authors wrote about combining radio with print and audiovisual media, with specific reference to educational books and video (Qhana 1986:6).

<sup>272</sup> At a seminar entitled 'Seminario Bolivia Construcción Democracia, y Sociedad de la Información' (Seminar Bolivia Construction of Democracy and the Information Society) held in La Paz on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2003, the then Director of *Claridad*, Adalid Contreras Baspineiro, said that the media were 'media of ideological construction. ICTs are only instruments. We mustn't hold them up as Gods (*endiosarlos*). The important thing is that they are filled with democracy.'

<sup>273</sup> The Director of *Claridad* explained to me that the Internet would be used for easier, more continuous and more affordable communication and broadcast, using microphones and programmes such as Real Audio. It was also hoped that they would create a webpage and that eventually the community members would be able to use the Internet to send messages to the radio.

important events in the Yungas via the national ERBOL network, the radio would be able, in his words, 'to have an eye on the world, and that they will recognise us too in the world'.<sup>274</sup>

The paradox lies in the fact that along with *Claridad's* vision of opening spaces of contestation in which to combat cultural alienation (Qhana 1986:7) there is a perceived need to adjust culture and discourse in order to be able to enter those very spaces. Soon after his arrival at the station, the new Director produced a series of slogans for the radio, using a well-spoken woman's voice with a La Paz accent. When some of the staff members suggested during a meeting that this stood in opposition to the radio's policy of using 'voces propias', 'own voices' of the region (ERBOL 1989:20-1; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006:xx-xxi), the Director acknowledged this, but replied that he thought that if Radio Yungas were to compete in the realm of the La Paz broadcasters, they would need to come across as a truly professional medium, and this would be achieved only by using 'really educated voices.'<sup>275</sup> It seems the radio's maxim that, 'the popular language that is practised in the region is, for Radio Yungas, the cultured language' (ERBOL 1989:21), had become outmoded.<sup>276</sup>

### **External 'Mediators' or a Part of the Communicative Ecosystem?: Working Within the Discourse to Accumulate Symbolic Capital**

In order to be able to work toward achieving its vision, *Claridad* must create an environment in which it can operate without untenable opposition. Originally an outsider to the coca production system, this means converting the economic capital (funding) and cultural capital (skills and knowledge) that it brings with it from outside the *field*, as well as the social capital that takes the form of connections with overseas funding bodies and the social networks that have been built within the Yungas over a long period of working in the region, into symbolic capital. It will do this by making strategic use of the radio waves in order to contribute to the discourse and communicate its value as an institution to the wider ecosystem of coca communications. This becomes all the more important due to the turbulent relationship *Claridad* has experienced with the inhabitants of the Municipality of Chulumani over the years. During the 1990s, *Claridad's* colossal error of recommending crop diversification as part of the proposed *Yungas 2000* project, along with the alleged misdirection of funds and the arrogant behaviour of employees, saw them promptly expelled from the area, despite their professed commitment to the defence of the coca leaf (Qhana 1994:6 cited in Chambi Cari 1997:94-95). Adalid Contreras Baspineiro, who worked with *Claridad*

---

<sup>274</sup> During a meeting with Radio Yungas staff to prepare for the Forum on the Referendum that the radio organised, the then Director expressed that there might be a possibility of transmitting the Forum via ERBOL (*Educación Radiofónica de Bolivia*; Radio Education of Bolivia), a national network of radio stations of which Radio Yungas is a member. If this happened, the Forum would be given national coverage. The Director said that this would be a great opportunity for Radio Yungas to do something important and to become better known. 'Radio Yungas could be famous,' one of the staff said.

<sup>275</sup> He said, 'This radio can be big, it can be international. I think that we can compete with city radios. If not in broadcast reach, then at least in quality. But how lovely it would be to become international. Radio Yungas international – it could be something really interesting.'

<sup>276</sup> See also Wilby and Conroy (1994:62) who write, 'The use of a language style may contribute towards a station's branding by signifying the relevance of its output to listeners who are local, of a specific age group or socio-economic group and, obviously, of an ethnic group for whom English is not a first language.'

for many years before becoming the director of the organisation, says of the first employees sent to work in Chulumani in 1990 that they considered themselves to be:

...the 'architects', the 'engineers,' and so on, and they had a very vertical relationship with the people... They say that to go and eat in the plaza, they went in their jeep... They showed that they had a lot of money. They didn't manage to form a good relationship with the people.

As we travelled through the Yungas one day in the back of a truck, I chatted with a woman on her way to harvest coca on another's property. It was not without disdain that she said of the radio, 'Now it belongs to the *Claridad*s! The *Claridad*s wanted to take it to Irupana. Who's going to let them?!' Such comments are not surprising, given that such a tainted organisation remained, stealthily and with little advertisement on the matter, as administrators of the radio after having been expelled from the area. Another man felt that he would not be welcome to speak on the radio due to the fact that he had previously spoken out against *Claridad*. 'It's run by *Claridad* and it's all about *Claridad*,' he said, 'to espouse the views of *Claridad*.'

Contreras feels however that enough time has passed for *Claridad* to begin to work carefully to repair the damaged relationship it has endured with the coca growers' organisations of the Yungas. 'It's a tough job,' he says, 'bringing *Claridad* back, but we're doing it.' And hence a project of reconstruction is begun, with the radio waves as a site of this reconstruction. As mentioned, shortly before my fieldwork ended in 2005, the then radio Director's contract came to an end and was not renewed by *Claridad*. Instead, a new person trained in communications was sent from *Claridad*, in La Paz, and not long after his arrival, slogans mentioning *Claridad* began to be heard frequently on the radio. '...and the Popular Education Centre, *Claridad*.' The slogan that was placed on banners and also heard on the radio to advertise a forum concerning the upcoming Referendum, read:

BECAUSE IT'S OUR TURN TO DECIDE: REFERENDUM, GAS AND CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY. RADIO YUNGAS, ADEPCOCA AND THE *CLARIDAD* CENTRE.<sup>277</sup>

This slogan was workshopped during a radio staff meeting before the event, but the inclusion of *Claridad*'s name was never questioned. *Claridad* uses the medium at its disposal to begin to familiarise the Yungas population with its name in conjunction with the radio, a locally respected institution. However, there is a dominant discourse that operates within the ecosystem of coca communications, and while *Claridad* have access to the technological means to freely espouse messages, in order to contribute to the discourse in a way that will allow them to successfully accrue symbolic capital for their organisation, they must be alive to the communicative context in which the messages are being heard and mediated (Scannell 1991:3; Westerkamp 1994:89). They must work within the dominant discourse, which means demonstrating at any opportunity that

---

<sup>277</sup> In Spanish: 'PORQUE NOS TOCA DECIDIR: REFERENDUM, GAS Y CONSTITUYENTE. RADIO YUNGAS, ADEPCOCA Y EL CENTRO *CLARIDAD*.'

*Claridad* is in favour of the coca leaf and that their policy is to defend it and the coca growers. As the new Director told me carefully in an interview:

We, since we are administrated by *Claridad*, have an agenda and we have a working policy in the region. For us, the issue of coca is extremely important. It's urgent, the coca issue. And as a policy, we are against coca eradication, and that is why we defend our comrades who harvest the coca leaf.

Adalid spoke to me eagerly about the 'observer of coca' that would be a part of the planned 'Yungueño network': a new role to be created for a person whose job it would be to remain constantly informed about the coca situation - about coca prices, blockades and the possibilities of eradication – and who would be responsible for transmitting that information via the network. One of the principal aims of the project, he said, would be defence of the coca leaf.

In 1986, *Claridad* acknowledged that while it was committed to the aspirations of the popular sectors, it was not a part of them, and wrote, '*Claridad*, like the other institutions, in the space of conflicts ... has a role of mediation between the sectors who are opposed in this conflict' (Qhana 1986:6). In fact, I suggest that organisations such as *Claridad* do not have the luxury of viewing themselves as external to this conflict, for while they are certainly outsiders to the coca production system, upon commencing work in this area, they enter the ecosystem of coca communications, albeit as outsiders, and begin to contribute to and influence cultural production in one way or another. Because of their position as outsiders who represent history's non-producing, urban, middle class *mestizo/blancos*, they must work particularly hard to communicate and make symbolic within this field the capital that they possess in terms of experience as professional communicators, social networks within the field and, most importantly, their own expressed recognition of the symbolic capital that accrues to coca growers and coca growers' organisations as legitimate in their struggles for material and cultural autonomy.

### **The Staff Member: Walking the Fine Line between Hero and Heretic**

I always listened to Radio Yungas with my grandparents. I lived with my grandparents. I used to listen with them in Aymara. I always dreamed of being a radio presenter; I imagined myself speaking.

(Lila, Radio Yungas Aymara Press Support)

I always had an objective. To make it to Radio Yungas, because it is the most listened to in the Yungas. It has AM and FM.

(Eduardo, Radio Yungas Press Team)



Radio Yungas staff are listener-narrowcaster-broadcasters whose childhood dreams of stunning the Yungas populace with their discursive brilliance have become a reality. Some of the youngsters who arrive on the doorstep of Radio Yungas in search of fame, if not fortune, gained their first radio experience as their community *corresponsal*, while others began working with one of the smaller local radio stations.<sup>278</sup> They arrive with carefully typed resúmenes hoping for a trial, or are head-hunted if identified as being verbally gifted. Radio Yungas constitutes the big time in Yungas media and has the luxury of being able to hand-pick the most talented young people from around the land.

At any one time during the course of my fieldwork, Radio Yungas had a core of around 15 paid, full-time staff members working in the central office, whose fairly meagre salaries were covered by the income generated through advertisements and announcements.<sup>279</sup> Apart from three staff members who had a long history and a large stock of acquired experience in the radio, the majority of these were young men and women between the ages of 18 and 25 who were enthusiastic, mostly dedicated, and had a natural flair for radio broadcasting. Most of these would not stay more than a few months however, some unable to adjust to the rigours of punctuality that a time-based medium demands, some returning to their communities for family or finance (the coca paying better than the radio), and some moving to the city to further their careers in a still wider soundscape.<sup>280</sup> Radio Yungas veteran Alejandro complains of the rapid staff turn-around rate:

It's a real obstacle... A new person comes and I have to teach them, right from the beginning. They've learnt, bam, they're gone. Work, patience, all for nothing. That's one of the disadvantages, the negative aspects of the radio.

An underlying reason for the rapid turn-around may have to do with the peculiar position within the coca *field* in which radio staff members find themselves. With the exception of the Director and one disgruntled staff member who had been brought from La Paz on the pretence of managing a telecentre that never eventuated, all of the staff members hailed from Yungas, mostly coca-growing, communities. They have grown up with coca and may return to coca at any stage, but while they are full-time Radio Yungas staff members, they have abandoned their status as coca growers and find themselves in a liminal space (Turner 1969), somewhere between legitimate Yungueño/coca grower, and outsider, with the privileges that accompany working for the radio,

---

<sup>278</sup> There are local radio stations in many of the larger towns. While some of these have been in operation for some time, smaller radio stations tend not to survive for very long, unable to compete with the larger radios and unable to finance operations. None of them have as wide a reach as Radio Yungas.

<sup>279</sup> While volunteering is an important and often indispensable aspect of many ICT projects (See Nair et al. 2006), this practice is not strong in the Yungas due to the fact that those who are not earning a full-time wage by some other means have obligations to avail of their much-needed labour in the family's, if not their own, coca field. Little value is placed upon engaging in work that is not economically remunerated, and people found it hard to believe that I was not being paid to work in the radio or the telecentre. They also found it hard to believe that I was being paid by a University to be in the Yungas and wondered why I went to the trouble of doing any work at all, since no one was checking up on me. Volunteers did work in the smaller radio stations and at the local television station, although they did not usually stay long, mainly for the reason that they were not being paid. A retired journalist said after ceasing volunteer work at a small radio station, 'They didn't pay us. We all worked for free and instead I ended up spending money to buy CDs, on lunch at the *pensión*.'

<sup>280</sup> As a listener, Aurelia says of the radio, 'It seems like it's just a course for them to learn. Each one should make a commitment to stay four or five years, but they just stay for a year.' See also Gumucio-Dagron (2001a:34), who writes with reference to the miners' radio stations, 'Many local journalists and announcers that were trained to work at the miners' stations later became renowned broadcasters when they migrated to the cities.'

working in an office, receiving a stable wage, living in town and having one foot on the ladder that may allow them to climb out of the Yungas and away from coca altogether. As they shift their labour affiliation, from producer to non-producer, they begin to climb that imagined ladder of class and ethnicity, from *campesino* to *mestizo* to *blanco* (Spedding 1994; Soux de Wayar n.d. See Chapter Three), adjusting as they do their ways of acting, speaking and dressing, as their habitus is thrown into new conditions where their opportunities for capital accumulation are altered (Bourdieu 1984:172-5). Suddenly, they find themselves torn between a staunch loyalty to the coca growers' organisations, and a desire to display the impartiality that they have learnt must characterise a good journalist.<sup>281</sup>

### **Hanging in a Liminal Space: The Struggle for Control of the Microphone and of the Production of Culture**

The padres created Radio Yungas for those who live in the Yungas... they lived here and saw that there was no radio that gave a voice to the people. That's why they did it, for the local people. They're the owners, not us. That's what we tell those who come sometimes with some complaint. They have to make suggestions to us, give us ideas, because the radio is not ours. We are going to leave, we are just passengers. The radio is theirs.

With these comments, a young staff member expresses the dilemma of someone who, despite living and having always lived in the Yungas, and therefore being 'local', nonetheless no longer falls into that category of someone who requires 'a voice' or who can claim to 'own' the radio. In effect, by taking on the role of staff member and assuming the microphone, he has ceased to be 'local' and, ironically, relinquished his right to representation and ownership. His role now, is to represent others and allow others' voices to be heard. The fact that the staff do have access to the microphone and some physical control over what is broadcast, does not translate to their having the potential to freely influence cultural production. Instead, the staff members must walk a tight-rope of diplomacy in order to please or appease the various conflicting political and syndical organisations of the Yungas, as well as the Catholic Church and NGO *Claridad*, as they work to achieve their own goals in terms of both individual capital accumulation and broader social and political change.

Rodrigo, who has recently begun working with the Press team at Radio Yungas, says, 'What has interested me most has always been informing people. That's what I always wanted to do.' Lila, a young woman who is unusual in that she continues to wear the traditional dress despite having

---

<sup>281</sup> Two of the staff members at the time of my fieldwork were studying communications externally through a La Paz university, while others were sent away to training courses. The Director who came on board shortly before the end of my fieldwork was especially concerned that the staff should have access to more journalistic training. Most of the learning however, is undertaken whilst working closely with the veteran staff members who pass on their experience as well as what they have learnt in training courses over the years since the radio's inception.

studied and abandoned agricultural labour practices, says, 'What I like most is sharing with the rural people, not the people from here (from the town). I do news articles and I tell them to talk about their communities, I want them to express themselves.' Simón began working for the radio as a *corresponsal*, after realising that he could use his tape-recorder to elicit statements from and at the same time call to account and question the people that he felt were jeopardising the future of a fledgling *campesino* corporation (CORACA Irupana).<sup>282</sup>

These people could not hope to be successful in fulfilling the social roles they have created for themselves without accruing and working to protect a certain amount of capital. Simón highlights the importance of social capital or in journalistic speak, 'contacts' (strong relationships of mutual respect and trust, especially with those most influential in the community), by saying, 'You have to get to know the *dirigentes*. We can't allow ourselves to be controlled; we have to be in control.' Also important is cultural capital (verbal and technical skills) and symbolic capital, which can be understood as the 'honour and prestige' (Bourdieu 1990:118) that is the legitimation of those other attributes and a denial of any economic interest, as afforded them by those people who are being asked to speak into their tape-recorder or listen to their programme (Bourdieu 1986). They acquire this by communicating their social and cultural capital through skilful speak over the airwaves, by appearing, apparently disinterestedly, in communities or at important events in representation of the radio, and by participating in public fundraising events or forums organised by the radio. If a Yungueño has suffered an accident or some other misfortune, the radio may, if approached, run a campaign to try to raise money for the person. Whilst continuous up-dates of the progress of the campaign are broadcast, live transmissions are made of (disinterested) staff members combing the town asking people for money.<sup>283</sup> Finally, legitimation occurs through formal and strategic recognition such as occurred at the Radio's 26<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations held in Chulumani's central plaza, where staff members were named and asked to take to the stage and introduce themselves to the audience.

Due to my own spectacular lack of symbolic capital as radio employee, ('You are not Yungueña; how could you be working for Radio Yungas?'), my attempts to solicit and record with my tape-recorder spontaneous responses from people who did not know me were highly unsuccessful.<sup>284</sup> In contrast, staff members who are successful in their attempts to accumulate and convert capital will enjoy a certain celebrity status, being addressed by programme participants as *estimado* ('esteemed') or *querido* ('dear') and being regarded as the informed authority on all topics. As a staff member passes through the plaza or stops at a shop for a milkshake, people will ask for an

---

<sup>282</sup> A type of organisation known as CORACA (*Corporación Agropecuaria Campesina, Campesino Farming Corporation*) was created in 1983 by the CSUTCB (*Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia, Sole Sindical Confederation of Campesino Workers of Bolivia*) at departmental and provincial levels, to become the 'economic arm' of the *campesino sindicatos*. The idea was to create a locally managed organisation focusing on production, income generation and livelihood issues. CORACA-Irupana, assisted by NGO *Claridad*, has had considerable success with coffee exportation. See Bebbington (1998).

<sup>283</sup> This is an effective way of raising money, as people are shamed into giving on air.

<sup>284</sup> I suspect also that the Director did not see it in the radio's interests to bestow formal and public recognition on my affiliation with the radio, because of the response that it may have engendered among the less trusting and more militant sectors of the population. When I first approached him with the idea of volunteering he asked first that I provide accreditation to 'verify that you are really doing a thesis, like you say'.

up-date on a topic of concern or solicit an informed opinion on a certain issue. Some listeners complain of *protagonismo*, referring to the way in which Radio Yungas staff members are actively raised to a status of celebrity and idolisation, and allegedly construct themselves as the most important feature of a programme, perhaps eclipsing the important messages that other participants may wish to transmit via the radio. The symbolic capital possessed by one who works for the radio could not be more succinctly illustrated than through one staff member's comment to Eduardo, the radio's cleaner and tea-maker, who also participates regularly in some of the programmes, when he threatened to leave the radio in response to changes made by the new Director. 'When you leave the radio,' Jorge warned him, 'you are nobody. Only here, you are somebody.'

Successful staff members influence the production of discourse to the extent that they decide which news items will be broadcast and present those items in a certain way, decide on the material to be broadcast during programmes and air material at strategic times, and in some cases, are able to implement their own ideas for new programmes. I was horrified at hearing my first attempt at a news item as voluntary reporter for Radio Yungas broadcast entirely differently from the way in which I had written it. After accompanying the Deputy Sub-Prefect of Sur Yungas and his delegation on a trip to Asunta to attend to various delicate legal matters, he agreed to allow me to interview him for the purposes of the radio. After my article had been vetted by the head of the Press team, the minor detail that the Deputy Sub-Prefect considered the creation of a national park in Asunta to be a good idea had been promoted to headline status: 'Sub-Prefect travels to Asunta to assess plans for creation of national park.' This made for a much more interesting news story, but may have caused considerable problems for the Sub-Prefect on his next trip to Asunta, a colonisation zone where the land is currently up for grabs for any who wish to cultivate it.<sup>285</sup>

This is one example of the staff members' relative power in producing knowledge and culture. However, the broadcasting decisions that they make are conditioned by, on the one hand, the oversight of the administering organisations, and on the other, by the listening that they themselves do and the understanding that they have of the communicative context in which their broadcasting will be received and mediated (Scannell 1991:3). Westerkamp writes:

Ideally, when we listen to radio we are listening to a listening medium. Radio listens through its microphones to the world, to human voices, to the environment. However, the microphone does not make choices. In itself it is without culture: the way it listens to the world is entirely determined by the recordist behind the microphone. Radio that listens then is about the recordist's position and perspective, the physical, psychological, political and cultural stance shaping the choices when recording.

(1994:89)

---

<sup>285</sup> Apart from demonstrating the power that news staff have in influencing discourse, this also illustrates the difficulties that arose in trying to be both news reporter and (ethical) anthropologist at the same time.



**FIGURE 22: A Radio Yungas staff member being showered with confetti and adoration at the radio station's 26<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations, Chulumani, (Photo by author, July 2004).**



As skilful broadcasters, the staff members must be aware of the way in which sensitive information may be interpreted, and assess the consequences in order to weigh up 'impartiality' with 'solidarity' (cf. Huesca 1996:41). One young staff member expressed this predicament:

The organisations always want to censure us, too. They want us to praise them. They get angry if we say something or other; they say that we're against them... The organisations are jealous, divided. We can't say things. They make a ruling (*voto resolutivo*) against personnel from the radio or against the Director. ...We can't be impartial. They think we have to support them totally, that we have to lie. We can't lie. We're not only there for the *cocaleros*. We're also there for those who grow coffee, rice, maiz, everything.

During my fieldwork, political differences prompted some members of ADEPCOCA<sup>286</sup> to vote to remove two long-term staff members from the radio.<sup>287</sup> These staff members were accused of prohibiting the different organisations from having equal access to participation on the radio.<sup>288</sup> One of the implicated staff members explains his position:

Well, surely some information that goes out on the radio can affect, shall we say, political interests, the interests of the *dirigentes*, which are personal interests at the same time... And there was a moment in which the situation (of fighting between and within organisations) was critical... there was fighting, and the fighting went out on the radio... During that time there were a lot of things that we didn't give coverage to, because you know, everyone wants to take over the radio. Everyone wants to use the radio. They want to use programmes, they want to use people... If I don't toe the line of (a certain organisation), 'He should go.'

Through these comments, he describes the struggle over cultural production of which the radio becomes a site (cf. Crisell 1986; Hutchby 1991), and the value that accrues to information according to its potential to earn or lose symbolic capital for certain groups or individuals and according to its having been widely distributed or restricted (cf. Keane 1994; Mosco 1996).<sup>289</sup> Another staff member who was targeted during this period, says, 'There are a lot of political

---

<sup>286</sup> ADEPCOCA, the Departmental Association of Coca Growers (*Asociación Departamental de Productores de Coca*), represents the interests of the coca growers of all Yungas provinces.

<sup>287</sup> See also O'Connor (1990:106), who writes of the miners' stations, 'At many stations... staff was changed each time a different political faction gained control of the local union. At other stations partisan messages had become so controversial that they were restricted by general agreement.'

<sup>288</sup> The staff members were considered to have demonstrated bias toward Evo Morales' political party MAS (Movement Towards Socialism), a party that grew out of and continues to represent the illicit coca-growing zone of the Chapare. The general position of coca grower organisations in traditional zones such as Chulumani is, for reasons of personal economic gain as well as the protection of cultural identity that is linked to traditional coca growing practices, that coca growing beyond the traditional zones should be disallowed. One of the targeted staff members explained that the radio had taken the position (in his view only incidentally in correlation with the MAS) that anyone (including growers from illicit zones) should have the right and the freedom to grow coca.

<sup>289</sup> See Hutchby (1991) on radio talk shows, and the types of power relations involved between host and caller, for example in drawing on-air conversations to a close (eg: Hutchby 1991:131-4). See also Crisell (1986:187) who makes the point that there is a greater sense of parity between presenter and listener than in other media such as television, since to the third-party listener, both are heard and not seen.



problems here... Here, the *dirigentes* want to control us, use us...' He also speaks of how political groups protest against having to pay to place advertisements on the radio. 'They want everything for free,' he says, and then laughs, 'We charge the politicians more – the thieves.' He goes on to describe how the different political parties would plant sympathisers in the various communities around the Yungas, strategically using participatory programmes to manipulate the discourse:

You can tell perfectly that it's completely set up... They give across the image that it's everyone's opinion... And you can tell. I can tell now that those guys are using me... So I realised, and I don't allow myself to be used either. Those from the government have used a communicative strategy, and they're still using it... I have to keep going forward (with the programme), that's all I can do... The moment that you tell him, 'No, you can't participate because this is going on,' they'll say, 'Ah, this guy's against the *campesinos*...' <sup>290</sup>

Like the young staff member quoted at the opening to this section, this presenter demonstrates that by taking on the role of radio staff member, he has forfeited his identity as *campesino*, and yet must attempt to perpetuate a symbolic representation of solidarity with the *campesinos* in order to retain and continue to accrue capital that is valued and recognised within the *field*, because 'they're the owners,' and he must operate within *their* discourse. And yet, his predicament is made all the more complex by virtue of the fact that he works within an organisational hierarchy that involves the Catholic Church and the administrating NGO *Claridad* (cf. Huesca 1995:151; Wilby and Conroy 1994).<sup>291</sup> His and other staff members' comments describe the experience of *Claridad*'s administration as one that, contradictorily to the NGO's explicit aims of facilitating the work of strengthening subordinated groups' autonomy in the face of external domination (Qhana 1986), represents paternalistic domination from 'above' and from outside, potentially replicating the patterns of core/periphery cultural domination put forward by dependency theorists (Beltrán 2006a; 2006b; Mattelart 1979; 1983; Martín-Barbero 1982, 2002).<sup>292</sup> One staff member explains:

I would like it to be more the Church as administrator, as owner, just the Church and its radio, you know? That there not be any other party, you know?... Because I note that the radio is not that independent. Let's say that right now some people begin to question the leaders (of the radio) or there is some problem. When that happens, the

---

<sup>290</sup> One staff member describes the difficulty in retaining control over a programme that allows unrestricted participation from the public: 'You prepare your topic for (the programme), and you don't get to develop your topic, because the people, they do the programme for you, they map out the programme. You arrive, you go in, you introduce yourself, and there's already somebody waiting in the *cajita* to participate... They participate, they finish, there's another one waiting, they finish, there's another one. Sometimes on the programme, which is broadcast from 8 to 10 in the morning, sometimes not a single piece of music gets played, and that worries me, because maybe people are changing the channel, it's just blah blah blah...' Another staff member said, with reference to the programme, 'Sometimes Alejandro is just like a facilitator,' and there were suggestions that since the programme was supposed to take a 'magazine' format, perhaps there should be attempts to include more directed and pre-prepared segments.

<sup>291</sup> Huesca (1995:151) has discussed the predicament that community radio can find itself in when caught between democratic potential, and economic dependency. See also Wilby and Conroy (1994:234-245) on radio station accountability to various stakeholders and the difficulties involved with respecting the interests of different organisations and listeners. They deal with legal constraints and issues of responsibility, ethics and trust.

<sup>292</sup> As discussed above, *Claridad* see themselves as 'mediators' between dominated groups and hegemonic power groups. They write, 'Without doubt it is in the identity of these groups, that the possibility resides of confronting the currents of alienation that, with the progress of the technical media, penetrate with ever more strength in our country' (Qhana 1986:7).

people go directly to *Claridad*. Let's say the new Director isn't liked by the Executive (of the Federation of *Campesinos*) of some place, and he questions him. That Executive isn't going to come to the radio – he goes to *Claridad*. He goes to the top, he complains. And from up above they come and say, 'Hey, why did you do that?' when the things could be sorted out amongst ourselves. That's what I see; we can do things fine by ourselves... So I think that harms the radio. Here, the radio needs to know how to solve its own problems, without there being another intervention from above. When the Augustinian padres were here, we got things under control here. With the Agroyungas project there were loads of problems... But everything was between the Director of the radio, the Church, and that's it; with that we resolved things, things were discussed between them. But not now; they go above us. Soon enough the observation arrives, 'This is what you did. What happened? You have to correct this.'

Another staff member, Jesús, demonstrated the same conception of *Claridad* being 'above' the radio on the hierarchy when he spoke about *Claridad's* practice of checking the radio's financial reports monthly and auditing the radio each year. He says:

I think it would be better to be independent. Because the way it is, it's difficult to make decisions; they always guide you from above. When an Institution is independent, it has its own life, and you have to think about where it's going to end up, where it wants to go, but the way it is now, it doesn't have that journey.

The hierarchy operating between *Claridad* and Radio Yungas was brought into stark relief when a network hook-up between Radio Yungas and the NGO's Radio *Claridad*, based in La Paz, was trialled for the first time at an important ADEPCOCA conference in La Paz. Most of the report that came through was from Radio *Claridad's* reporter, with Radio Yungas' reporter only given a short amount of air space, leading one long-time staff member, Jorge, to quip, 'So Martín is unnecessary there.' That this was understood by Radio Yungas staff as a power struggle between Yungueños and outsiders was illustrated most clearly when the new Director arrived in early 2005, appointed by *Claridad*, and bringing with him another professional communicator whose role in the radio was unclear to the staff members, but apparently multi-purpose.<sup>293</sup> As we filed records away one day, I asked Jorge where the new employee was from. He replied vehemently:

He says he's from the Yungas. From P... Do you reckon? How could *he* be from the Yungas? Nadia is more Yungueña than him. More *sencilla*.

While much taller and fairer skinned than most people from the Yungas, it was not this man's appearance that Jorge highlighted as necessarily negating his right to call himself Yungueño, but his demeanour; the manifestation of his habitus. Rather than possessing the ideal Yungueño or

---

<sup>293</sup> Jorge complained that the new employee had taken over the presenting of a programme that was the job of a new recruit, claiming that the new recruit, who had been found wandering aimlessly during the airing of his programme, lacked the experience to do it. 'I don't want to hear his name anymore. He thinks he's the boss of everything,' said Jorge, explaining how the new employee had even been found sitting in the Director's office and using his phone, a privilege that would never be extended to the other staff members.

Aymara virtue of *sencillez* (simplicity and humbleness), he was domineering and authoritarian – like an outsider.

### The *Corresponsal*: Lonely Gatekeepers

The *corresponsal* (literally, ‘correspondent’) keeps the gate to one of the most important avenues of communication within this communicative ecosystem. The *corresponsal* is a listener-narrowcaster-broadcaster who, on account of the economic capital that he or she possesses and has successfully converted into social, cultural and symbolic capital within the coca *field* (Bourdieu 1986:252-5), has been elected to this important position within the *sindicato* by community vote, usually through a show of hands. On being elected, this person is placed in charge of the community’s *cajita*, and is responsible both for receiving the many announcements and song requests that community members wish to transmit across the soundwaves, as well as reporting news from the community and surroundings. This may be done either live on air via the *cajita*, dictated via *cajita* to a central staff member later to be read out, or by sending a written text to the central office by some other means, demonstrating again the way in which a single medium such as radio is nonetheless embedded in a wider communicative ecosystem.<sup>294</sup> It would seem then the person entrusted with this important role has the key to enabling the facilitation or impediment of the propelling out of a person’s words, ideas, requests, demands, from the community into the public sphere of the coca *field*; the ability to engineer or quash a meeting between lovers, to coordinate the cement bags with the ready workers, to expose corruption in leadership and protect the community from commercial fraud. Yet the *corresponsal*’s power over information control is by no means unchecked, as we shall see.

The first recruitment of *corresponsales* or *reporteros populares* (popular reporters) in Latin America is said to have been initiated by the Catholic organization, ALER<sup>295</sup>, and is now practised in various countries across the region (Huesca 1996:32), although the author of ‘Radio Yungas from the Inside’ (Anonymous n.d.:6) claims that Radio Yungas was the pioneer of this practice that was then to be echoed around other regions of Bolivia.<sup>296</sup> In line with the trend toward a more democratic and participatory communication that was occurring at the time, as discussed above (c.f. Camacho Azurduy 2000; Contreras Baspineiro 2000b; Contreras Baspineiro and Pérez Arenas 1984), ALER saw the popular reporters as providing a voice for the marginalised and poor (especially rural) sectors of society. In a booklet designed as a guide for radio stations working with popular

---

<sup>294</sup> In some areas, such as in the *altiplano*, as documented by Huesca (1996:33) *corresponsales* must entrust their written news articles to a truck driver or other traveller to then be delivered to the radio station. The *cajita* is a much more reliable method of transmitting information.

<sup>295</sup> *Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica* or Latin American Association of Radio Education.

<sup>296</sup> One ex-Radio Yungas staff member described how the idea of *corresponsales* was introduced into the radio during the 1980s: ‘It was Eric Brigsen – he really liked to go out into the communities. He instigated it. Also Franz Ulo (the only Yungueño to have become Director of the radio. He is now a well-known television presenter in La Paz) – he had the role of trainer. There weren’t many *corresponsales*. Ten, or something more than ten *corresponsales* at the beginning. They always worked for free, out of free will. Sometimes they gave them batteries or something.’

reporters, ALER write, 'It will never be too late for the people (*pueblo*, meaning grassroots) to write their news item, grab the microphone and participate in the public debate from the vantage point of their reality' (ALER 1993:3). They were concerned with rectifying a situation in which news regarding the 'common people' (*pueblo común*) was either not presented at all, or represented the marginalised sectors as either criminals, drug-addicts, or the victims of natural disasters (ibid.:7). In the guidebook, beneath the heading, 'We want to move democracy forward,' (common) people are depicted beneath speech bubbles, saying:

In the great theatre of society, the *pueblo* has resigned itself to being an audience that only watches, applauds or boos.

Now, with the popular reporter, this *pueblo* steps up on stage to convert itself into an actor and to participate in the fourth power, that of information and communication, and the rest of the powers as well.

(ALER 1993:11)

According to Huesca (1996:34), popular reporters are part of the project to 'recover and preserve traditional language, values and cultural practices that have been assaulted for 500 years and are struggling to survive the current age of mass communication.' ALER (1993:55) consider that in a context in which the greatest challenge is the democratisation of the information and communication technologies around which the world economy will be revolving in the new millennium, the popular reporter is the 'first link of the great chain of popular communication.' Let us now assess how this manifests or does not manifest itself, on the ground.

### **First Link or Fourth Category in the Great Chain of Popular Communication?**

In a study of Mexico's XEYT Radio Cultural Campesina, an ALER affiliate, radio volunteers are divided into four 'classes' or 'categories', the lowest of which is occupied by the 'rural correspondents' and 'other rural volunteers such as the post-deliverer' (Arias-Godínez 1990:113-116).<sup>297</sup> A similar hierarchy might be compiled with regards to Radio Yungas personnel, suggesting a discrepancy between the discourse of citizen media and democratic communications espoused by ALER above (1993:55), and that which occurs in practice.

Aldo is the *corresponsal* from the small and fairly isolated community where Benjamin and Carola have settled. Like the other community members, he heads off to harvest early each day, and returns home at 1 o'clock to avoid the worst of the sun. In the evenings he is free, if not too tired or busy, to open up the bare little room that is Radio Yungas' office, in order to allow people to dictate

---

<sup>297</sup> The first category includes part-time announcers, the second, novice announcers, the third, different members of the community who visit the radio once or twice a week, and finally 'rural correspondents, other rural volunteers such as the post-deliverer (who takes letters from the community to the radio) and the person in charge of quality control of the programmes in different communities' (Arias-Godínez 1990:113-116).

their messages to him. The office is situated overlooking the community's football field, the hub of town. Aldo is soft-spoken and seems despondent when he discusses his job with me, and when he describes how Radio Yungas central staff have sometimes treated him with a lack of respect during their exchanges over the *cajita*, reaffirming the kind of hierarchy that operates despite the rhetoric. Unwilling to entirely condemn the staff, he qualifies his statement by saying that he thinks they become stressed when under pressure, and that the *corresponsales* provide an outlet for their frustrations.

Of course, there are examples of Radio Yungas staff having been exceptional in encouraging *corresponsales*. Rebeca, a young member of the Press team, spoke to a *corresponsal* who called in to the station to explain that he had not been able to prepare any news items. She told him that he would soon get into the swing of things and would learn to really like finding news. 'You should give it a go', she said. 'A few years from now, you'll be an Executive, *compañero*.' 'I doubt it,' replied the *corresponsal* self-effacingly, and in accordance with his level within the Radio Yungas hierarchy. The feeling experienced by the *corresponsales* of being marginalised and devalued within the radio community is perhaps most sharply felt in the lack of training that they receive despite, they told me, having been promised training on various occasions.<sup>298</sup> They feel that this makes it difficult to contribute meaningfully to the radio. Aldo explains why he is not currently fulfilling the part of his role that requires him to become an active news reporter on behalf of his community:

At the moment I'm not really working with news due to time constraints and also maybe because of... how can I tell you, because of training – sometimes when you have to do a news article, without knowing anything it's a little bit difficult. You have to order everything, you have to draft everything without missing anything out or without, shall we say, alluding to anybody or without anybody feeling hurt – it's a little bit difficult, shall we say, to get a news item out without having the training to report news or to write up the information, so that's what we struggle with... so that's why we sometimes just remain stagnant (nos quedamos ahí nomás también).<sup>299</sup>

During one period, the *corresponsales* set up a Union, the Directive of *Corresponsales*, but Aldo told me that it was not currently functioning. 'It's just stagnant. (Se ha quedado ahí.) That's why

---

<sup>298</sup> A long-time staff member told me how the Augustinian padres and the permanent staff members had initially trained the *corresponsales* when they were first introduced into radio practice in 1979. 'Franz Ulo (the only Yungueño to have become Director of Radio Yungas and now a national television personality) was one of the first presenters and he was a teacher for the *corresponsales*. They gave them guidelines, about how to do a news item. The rules; "Where, when, who, what is going to be done." For example, "In the *Sindicato* headquarters, Tuesday at 12 o'clock, all the community members are going to meet to discuss..." Huesca (1996:42) described a similar journalistic teaching method. Chambi Cari (1997:49) describes various training sessions undertaken by Radio Yungas reporters in 1993. It is worth noting that shortly before the end of my fieldwork, the radio came under the direction of a new Director who was concerned with the training situation and planned to hold a meeting later that year in which the *corresponsales* would be asked to discuss their training needs.

<sup>299</sup> Another *corresponsal*, however, thought that there was the support available for those who wished to become more active in broadcasting, and in one community there were complaints that the *corresponsal* did nothing. Some *dirigentes* complained that while the previous *corresponsal* used to walk around asking for news, the newly elected person does nothing. 'No hay voluntad.' 'There's no will.'

there's no strength to be able to ask for a serious training course, for example.'<sup>300</sup> While some *corresponsales* were more active than others during my fieldwork, as a group or 'class' (Arias-Godínez 1990:113-116), they were largely left to fend for themselves as abandoned members of the 'Radio Yungas family' and were not given the acknowledgement, support or skills that perhaps they needed in order to make this experience of horizontal, bi-directional communication as meaningful as it might have been (Contreras Baspineiro 2000b:32). This lack of recognition was most aptly demonstrated by the fact that the *corresponsales* went almost without mention at the large celebrations that were held in Chulumani's central plaza for the 26<sup>th</sup> birthday of the radio, and in which paid staff members were individually named and introduced.

### **Holding the Key, but Unable to Enter: Negotiating Isolation in a Community Full of People**

The *corresponsal's* predicament is confounded by the fact that he or she is not just a member (abandoned or not) of the 'Radio Yungas family', but also a member of a community, with all the social differentiation and power negotiations that this entails. As mentioned, in order to be elected to this position, the *corresponsal* must be a member of the *sindicato*, which implies that he or she owns land and is reasonably well situated within the coca *field* and within the community (cf. Arias-Godínez 1990:119).<sup>301</sup> He or she must also have access to strong social networks (social capital), be considered intelligent, articulate and literate (cultural capital; cf. Huesca 1996:33), and have converted these virtues (and the economic capital that underlies all of this) into symbolic capital in the form of respect within the community.<sup>302</sup>

Few women are elected to the position of *corresponsal*, for while they may own land, have strong social networks and have completed school, the habitus that generates the 'mutually intelligible' practices by which community members live their lives (Bourdieu 1990:58) makes it difficult for them to convert those values into symbolic capital as might occur through the active participation in *sindicato* meetings or other public arenas (See Chapter Three). Huesca (1996:50) makes the point that sometimes seemingly democratic processes, such as voting for a *corresponsal*, may produce anti-democratic results, in this case, a perpetuation of gender inequalities.<sup>303</sup>

---

<sup>300</sup> In his 1997 study of Radio Yungas, Chambi Cari (1997:48-49) described an active Union called the Centre of *Campesino* Popular Communication (Coca Uru), that had elected leaders and organised festivals, distributed videos dealing with the problems of the Yungas and were the protagonists of their own radio programmes in which they sang songs, told stories, recited poetry, acted and compiled oral histories. Certainly during my own fieldwork, the *corresponsales* were not active in this way.

<sup>301</sup> A similar scenario is outlined for XEYT Radio Cultural Campesina in Arias-Godínez (1990:119).

<sup>302</sup> ALER (1993:15) write in their guide that *corresponsales* must have completed at least six years of schooling, preferably more, and be able to read and write fluidly (cf. Huesca 1996:33).

<sup>303</sup> Huesca (1996), who undertook an ethnographic study on the popular reporters of Radio Pío XII, one of Bolivia's better known miners' radio stations, quotes outreach workers explaining the difficulties in recruiting women to participate in popular reporters' training courses: '...there are instances, categories where the woman has participation – in the home. She has more influence. But men have more influence in the communal where more decisions are made. This is what it is in these courses. Even though we have demanded more participation of women, we haven't seen very much participation' (V. Quispe in Huesca 1996:43). 'There are other factors, too. For example, when women are married, there are times when the husband will not let her participate. She has her babies and no one to leave them with. Another obligation is her husband – she must work and cook for him. So, in situations like that, she cannot participate in courses' (J. Molina in Huesca 1996:44). The same issues apply in the Yungas, as discussed in Chapter Three.



Once elected, the title of '*corresponsal*', an affirmation of the fact that all these types of capital have been recognised within the individual, becomes on its own a direct form of further symbolic capital for the person elected, which can in turn be converted back into social capital as members of the wider communicative ecosystem get to know and wish to interact with that person, as well as cultural capital in the form of skills, and finally further economic capital in the form of a twenty percent cut received on all announcements and song requests dictated to the *corresponsal* for broadcast. However, the *corresponsal* must work hard to make these conversions within a community fraught with the tensions of daily power struggles. As is to be expected, intra-community rivalries can both bear upon the election of a *corresponsal*, and be exacerbated by it, and these divisions are likely to play a part in the *corresponsal*'s everyday journalistic career (See Chapter Four).

In illustration, one *corresponsal* told me how he had come to occupy the role. By his account, he had been more proactive and successful in selling airtime to community members (due to his superior social networking skills) than the person fulfilling the role at that time, and after an intervention by the Radio Yungas Director, the role had been handed over to him. His work never ceases though, for during my fieldwork the General Secretary mentioned to a friend that the *corresponsal* was becoming old and lazy, and perhaps it was time for a change in guard. On another occasion, a woman told me how she and her husband were previously in charge of the *cajita* in their community, but that despite the fact that they had been trained and knew how to operate the equipment, a young man had now been placed in charge instead. 'He doesn't know anything, doesn't know how to use it – we were trained!' she said. 'And he doesn't do anything! He has the key and goes in when he likes; we can't go in.' She said that since she had been displaced from her role, no one was guiding the community's participation in the Tuesday night women's programme, *Ajayu*. She was willing to continue with this role, but could no longer gain access to the room where the *cajita* was housed. A particular social section of that community (women) lost their ability to participate and make their voices heard on a programme specifically designed for them, due to the internal dynamics of the community (the details of which are unknown to me) that led to the re-election of *corresponsal*.

As members of both a socially differentiated community and the 'Radio Yungas family', *corresponsales* must learn to walk a fine line between fulfilling their informational obligations to the radio, and compromising the important and necessary relationships and social networks that he or she has cultivated with members of the community and beyond (du Toit et al. 2007; Nair et al. 2006; cf. Chambi Cari 1997:49). This is clearly demonstrated by Aldo, quoted above, when he expresses the dilemma in attempting to construct a news article 'without missing anything out' and at the same time without 'alluding to anybody or without anybody feeling hurt.' Huesca (1996:41) describes the attempt made by trainers at a *popular reporters*' training session at Radio Pío XII, to address this dilemma. When the trainees discovered that some of the qualities deemed desirable in

a popular reporter conflicted with each other (for example, 'impartial' and 'in solidarity'), the trainers suggested that context would determine a reporter's approach. One of the trainers explained:

The people's reporter cannot be neutral when he is with his people. He cannot be centrist – here are the poor, here are the rich. When there is an injustice, the people's reporter should be there in solidarity. When it comes to political parties, there he should be neutral.

(V. Quispe cited in Huesca 1996:41)

However, this would suggest a false homogeneity and unity within communities and within 'his people' (cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:9; 2001b:12; CIPCA 1976). In fact, a *corresponsal* becomes beholden to the most influential members of the community - those best positioned within the *coca field* - possibly at the expense of others. Aldo described the lack of support he receives from the *dirigentes* of his community:

Sadly the *corresponsal* is just left alone, and that's it... you can't get much support from the *dirigentes*... The *dirigentes* rarely appear here (at the office) and you have to... you always have to go and look for them... and they don't like me to record them, or they don't like, for example... going on air or maybe you're making a recording and they don't like to come across that way. Then you end up annoying some *dirigentes*.

The *corresponsal* may be a source of concern for certain interested individuals, because of his or her potential to make available in the public sphere information that might jeopardise the symbolic capital that a person has successfully nurtured and the social networks strategically created. This holds also for the community as a whole, as it is in the group's interests to retain the image of cohesiveness and unity, and therefore strength, that they have nurtured and work constantly to present to the wider ecosystem (See also Chapter Seven).

In one *sindicato* meeting I attended, the *corresponsal*, who had been fervently recording the proceedings on a small tape-recorder, raised his hand and said respectfully, 'I have recorded on tape what the Señora X said. Perhaps I would like to ask permission to broadcast it on the radio?' The unanimous and ill-tempered reply was, 'No!'

Influential people within the community work to maintain control over the powerful commodity that is information, and they use the influence that they have to pressure the *corresponsal* to remain silent, or to replace him or her with someone else. This is said to have occurred after a *corresponsal* broadcast the news that drink driving had been the cause of a car accident in which a member of the local council died. This information reflected badly not only on the council member, who had been driving, but also on the community whose members were said to have encouraged

the council member to share some drinks with them before driving back to town.<sup>304</sup> At this time, the *corresponsal* lost his job in an attempt to disseminate the truth, but there may also be implications for him in the future in terms of securing land, labour, and so on, showing how material and cultural relations are intertwined.

It may be that the majority of *corresponsales* fall into an unusual category whose relatively favourable situation within the community and within the relations of material production have actually worked adversely in terms of their ability to influence cultural production, placing them in a similar predicament to the staff members. While they may be equipped with the technological means to capture information, create, mediate and transmit, they are restricted by their social obligations to their community, and by their ethical obligations as Radio Yungas journalists, who, what is more, are low on the radio's hierarchical ladder.<sup>305</sup> I will end with Aldo's words:

... sometimes we're not given the opportunity to express ourselves via the radio... We are simply *corresponsales* and we have to get other people to participate – that's what they've told me in past years. I wanted to put across my personal opinion and they tell us that as *corresponsales* we can't make our own opinions heard. Only other people can express their opinions, you can only interview people – that's what they told us our job was.

### **The Listener-Narrowcaster-Broadcaster: Negotiating Membership of the Radio Yungas Family**

I have argued that Radio Yungas is the medium most compatible with the ecosystem of coca communications because of the various properties that make it accessible to a majority of people and because of its capacity for multi-directional information flow. I have argued that the radio facilitates the construction of a 'Radio Yungas family', an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) of Yungas people with a common identity. This section will deal with the matters of what sort of a family this is, who is included or excluded from the family, and how its internal membership is structured, as well as what the different family members choose to do or are able to do with their membership. Within the family, some listen, some ('false') narrowcast and some broadcast, and some partake in a combination of all three, depending on their position within the coca *field*.

---

<sup>304</sup> The council members had taken a vehicle to work the community's roads, and the offering of alcohol is a way of showing appreciation. Declining alcohol at such a time can be regarded as a rejection of friendship and of the thanks offered. For a council member (non-producer, *mestizo* or *blanco*), it is particularly important to work at building, rather than jeopardising, relationships with producers (*campesinos*), as a denial of historical continuity and, in this case, as a protection of future votes.

<sup>305</sup> Chambi Cari (1997:48) presents a *corresponsal's* role as relatively unproblematic when he writes that 'the popular reporter should be a leader of opinion in his/her community, a defender of coca and an active participant in the radio'.

Let us begin with listening. Reception studies have long attempted to analyse the 'influences' or 'effects' that media content has on audiences (cf. Crisell 1986:191; Tufte 2001b:29, 31; 2005b:719). While the media was initially understood to operate according to a 'hypodermic model', having 'the power to "inject" a repressive ideology directly into the consciousness of the masses' (Lerner 1958; 1967; Pasquali 2006; Schramm 1967; cf. Morley 1992:45), the 1980s and 90s saw a shift in communication studies that built upon earlier works to move toward an approach that paid more attention to the social and cultural contextual factors that intervene in the mediation process (Counihan 1973; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Martín-Barbero 2002; Morley 1992). Studies of reception and cultural consumption came to the fore and gave primacy to the mediations and resignifications that occur between the emission of the message and the meaning-making that occurs at the reception end (Contreras Baspineiro 2000b:36-37; Tufte 2001b:29).<sup>306</sup> Guardia (n.d.:1) writes how reception studies were initially met with some resistance by communications studies in Latin America, as the dominant ideology had supposed that communications media had an unquestionable power over its audiences, and to suggest that these seemingly passive audiences were not only active receptors of messages, but also protagonists in processes of cultural production and interaction was a highly radical proposition. However, by the mid-1990s, more and more studies were incorporating these ideas, and development communication campaigns began to be evaluated according to this focus, to discover whether they were achieving their desired aims (ibid.:2).

This is important for radio since, due to its nature as a portable and non-visual medium, radio sound is able to become a part of the soundscape of the everyday, and is thus subject to the conditioning of the social context in which it finds itself (cf. Scannell 1991:3; Tacchi 1998:43; 2000:293). Spitulnik (2002:338) writes that 'media both create and are created by social spaces,' and in the same way, the discourse creates its listeners and is created by them. She also draws attention to the fact that media content is not necessarily the only or the main element to be taken into account when considering the experience of radio listening:

...the consumption and use of a mass medium such as radio does not strictly revolve around people's interactions with media content. The notions of 'audience' and 'reception' – if limited to the sender/receiver dyad and the individual interpretive moment of decoding messages – neither exhaust nor encompass the range of relations that people have with radio.

(Spitulnik 2002:349)<sup>307</sup>

---

<sup>306</sup> Tufte (2001b) advocates the use of ethnography to uncover and understand aspects of the 'meaning-making process' undergone by audiences as they receive and mediate messages transmitted via the media.

<sup>307</sup> Spitulnik (2002:338) is concerned with how 'features of *media technology* itself enable or inhibit certain kinds of audience engagements,' and raises the possibility that 'social context is just as much a determinant of people's active reception and use than is any kind of individual interpretative process.' She writes, 'radios are portable machines, and their sounds drift through social spaces' (Spitulink 2002:339). Crisell (1986:215) writes, 'radio is imported into the everyday life of the audience.'

'They give us information,' says Carola, 'but we don't take any notice. If there are people (harvesting), we talk more than we listen.' Here, she describes the way that radio sound is alternately foregrounded and backgrounded, depending on fluctuations of the activities of the listeners, as well as on the varying level of interest the content holds for them (Crisell 1986:209; Spitulnik 2002:342-3; Tacchi 1998:27). People listen to Radio Yungas to relieve the tedium of the everyday (cf. Crisell 1986:213) and to provide a familiar structure for their lives (ibid.:202). Coca growers know it is midday and time to break for lunch when the familiar (and long awaited) sounds of the 'Hymn to the Yungas' can be heard emanating from the radio. A glance around the valley at this time will see workers straightening up, emptying their harvested coca into a larger sack, and sinking beneath a tree to enjoy a packed lunch.<sup>308</sup> But they listen also for the social experience that is both group listening (the group of harvesters share the listening experience and call out, 'Did you hear?' before discussing what has been broadcast), and listening as part of a wider listenership, an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983; Crisell 1986:202). Perhaps it is this that Aurelia expresses when she reiterates what has now become a cliché; 'Radio Yungas is like a mother to us.'<sup>309</sup>

For the group of harvesters in the coca field and the man who harvests alone, for the worker who walks by the roadside, the coffee grinder, the coca dryer, the mother and daughter who sit outside at the dying end of the day, it is not so much the ubiquitous black apparatus that is important (everybody has one, shaded beneath a tree, slung over the shoulder, hanging on the back of a door), or even, a lot of the time, the particular words or sounds that emanate from it. It is the *collective* experience (whether undertaken alone or with others) of listening to Radio Yungas, and of being a part of what becomes (not accidentally) the extended yungueño family (cf. Spitulnik 2002:349). Tacchi (1998:43) writes that radio sound helps to establish relationships, in part imagined but nonetheless with real impact, between self and others. Teresa betrayed the essence of this when she told me that Radio Yungas was the best radio station because, 'everyone in the region listens to it – all the messages and so on.'

But who is 'everyone'? From the discussion in Chapter Four, we know that Radio Yungas is, in the words of our chicken farmer and town-dweller Regina, 'mostly a radio of the *campesinos*.' However, with the exception of the early morning news and the agriculturally oriented evening programme, *Akhulli*, which exclude non-indigenous non-producers by virtue of the fact that they are both broadcast mainly in Aymara, it is not so much the programme structure that excludes Regina and other townfolk from the family. With the main bulk of the programming directed by listener participation, it follows that if the content broadcast is guided by a discourse that excludes her in that it is *campesino* and in particular, *cocalero* in nature, it is because townfolk are not accepting the theoretically open invitation to step up to the microphone. And the reason they are not doing so is because, on the one hand, they are watching television or talking on the telephone (their sedentary labour activities and geographical location allow them to do so), and on the other, the

---

<sup>308</sup> Tacchi (1998:25) writes, 'Radio sound can be seen to fill "empty" space and "empty" time with a familiar routine.'

<sup>309</sup> Tacchi (2002a:14) writes, 'The potential meanings of words such as "intimate", "friend" and "company" when used in relation to radio, have more significance than a linguistic analysis can uncover'. See also Crisell (1986:202).

nature of the Radio Yungas family as *campesino*, as *cocalero*, is being reinforced daily by presenters and participants alike, most clearly illustrated through the ways in which these greet and in so doing, reaffirm, this family. When participants take to the microphone, they place as much attention on addressing this family, as they do in greeting the presenter, and non-producers are not included:

To all my *cocalero* brothers, Yungueños, Yungueñas, to all my dear Catechist brothers and sisters.

(President of Catechists, *Contacto*, Radio Yungas)

To all the brothers who listen to the programme *Contacto* in all the Yungas, and the producers of coca.

(*Corresponsal*, Machaca Marka, *Contacto*, Radio Yungas)

Greetings to all the Yungas, to the coca producers.

(*Corresponsal*, Apa Apa, *Contacto*, Radio Yungas)

A little bit of sacrifice was lacking on our part – on the part of the companions, producers of the coca leaf.

(*Dirigente*, *Contacto*, Radio Yungas)

The Radio Yungas family is and continues to reproduce itself as a *campesino* and a *cocalero* family because the listeners (the *cocaleros*, those who harvest, walk by the roadside, grind coffee, dry coca, sit outside at the end of the day) are also the narrowcasters, and some of them the broadcasters who fill the blank-page programmes with content. In contrast to Tacchi's (1998:32) observation that radio is often used by listeners 'as a way of "switching off" from social aspects of their lives,' and that it 'provides them with an environment that is nevertheless social and thus reassuring, but demands nothing of them,' radio listening becomes for Yungas coca growers a continuation of and extension of the social interactions that occur within the family on a daily basis, and often a reminder of the social obligations that come with being a part of this family. Several people no doubt sigh as they hear this message:

Attention in Malquiribi, Arapata sector: It is communicated to the absentees (*faltones*) of the second *faena* (work party), that they must go out to participate in the clearing of the road up to the hut and they must meet in the place already mentioned with their work tools such as machetes and axes. This is for Thursday the 5th of May, meaning tomorrow, at 8 o'clock in the morning. Absentees will be sanctioned in accordance with that which was agreed upon in the previous meeting. Signed, the General Secretary and Secretary of Roads.



NOTE: This figure is included on page 210 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

**FIGURE 23: The *El Viajero* booth, at *la tranca*, Chulumani.** (Reproduced with permission from Cristian Mendoza, June 2005)

The above message is an example of what I call 'false narrowcasting' (see Chapter Four; cf. Becker 2006; Hirst and Harrison 2007; Naficy 1998; Sterne 2005), since the message is intended only for a select group of recipients, and yet the broadcast medium of radio is the best or only mechanism available to reach them. In fact, the broadcasting nature of radio circumvents the problem that perhaps not all of the intended recipients will be listening at the time the message is broadcast, for they will nonetheless come to know of the message via someone who did happen to be listening and paying attention. It is via such 'false narrowcasting' that community members maintain already existing social networks where these are stretched across distance, and to extend them, thereby achieving the 'experience-distant' (Geertz 1989) aims of protecting or accumulating social and economic capital (cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:33; Skuse and Cousins 2007).<sup>310</sup> During the life-span of the radio station, people who were initially reluctant to speak in the public sphere have become accustomed to doing so, some through lack of choice where urgent need overwhelmed stage-fright (Huesca 1995:159). Manuel, who was the first presenter of *El Viajero* when the programme began in 1993, remembers how reticent people were to participate:

That time there was no booth. I was a mobile reporter. I went about with my radio, nothing else. There in the tranca (entrance to the town), I sought out people who weren't used to speaking. I went to where there were people, to ask them about something or other, and the people fled!

Alejandro says:

People were afraid to speak on the radio before. They didn't participate much. You had to force them, you know? There was no participation from the people. Whoever was presenting the programme had to devise ways to make the programme participatory, so that they would listen to the programme... But now people participate a lot. It didn't use to be like that. So people have really developed their expression, in using the communications media, all that. They've developed a lot.

So, the school student, the elderly grandmother and the young worker (all producers), might all be heard speaking on *El Viajero*, the travellers' messaging programme, or perhaps *Felicitaciones en Familia*, the song request programme, provided they can muster up the 6 bolivianos that represents the cost of a message placement. However, there are radio spaces, such as the serious current affairs participatory programme, *Contacto*, or the agricultural programme, *Akhulli*, where a less diverse cross-section of voices will be heard. These are the voices of the *broadcasters*; those who intend and wish for their message to be heard by a wide audience. These programmes provide certain people with the opportunity to engage in debate and to attempt to influence public opinion with their words, within a much wider sphere and including a larger number of participants (both on and off the airwaves) than would otherwise be possible (cf. DfiD 2004; Rennie 2002; Rodriguez 2002). The importance of such communicative opportunities was highlighted when

---

<sup>310</sup> Gumucio-Dagron (2001a:33) writes similarly that the miners' radio stations became the most effective replacement for telephone and postal services.

Guillermo told me how NGO *Claridad* had organised a course about the hydrocarbons referendum to facilitate people's understanding of the issues before they were required to vote.<sup>311</sup> 'They only informed us with three days to go,' he said. 'If they inform us with time to spare, we can go to the radio to speak about it, to discuss.' In Guillermo's eyes, the information made available to those who attended the course could not be considered valid until brought to life through the communicative forum that are the Radio Yungas airwaves, where it could be discussed and dissected publicly.<sup>312</sup>

Analysis of Radio Yungas content shows that those who are most often heard over the airwaves, and especially on the more serious programmes mentioned, are *dirigentes*. As we now know, the Radio Yungas family is socially differentiated according to its members' positions within the *field*; their land ownership, labour capital, social capital, sindical participation, exchange and consumption practices, and the *dirigentes* are at the peak of that hierarchy. They are mostly male,<sup>313</sup> necessarily own land (a prerequisite of *sindicato* membership), and have the sufficient social and symbolic capital within their community to be elected to the role of *dirigente* in the first place.<sup>314</sup> Huesca (1995:152) makes the point that participation cannot be equated with democracy as has tended to occur in the literature (cf. Downing 2006), giving the example of the way in which the Bolivian tin miners' radios have been presented as though they 'exist in a bifurcated world in which the exploited working class fights in solidarity against the industrial oligarchy' (Huesca 1995:154). He writes:

The alternative communication theories stemming from the miners' experiences ignore issues of the reproduction of power, even when certain groups (women, for instance)

---

<sup>311</sup> In 2004, a national referendum was held to determine how Bolivia's oil and gas reserves would be used. This is a highly emotive topic for Bolivians, who were aware that multinational corporations were reaping the majority of the gains from these resources, and one that led to the uprisings and violence of October 2003. Many saw the referendum as a sham, as it avoided including a question directly relating to the nationalisation of these resources (cf. Kohl and Farthing 2006:182-3). In the lead-up to the referendum, there was a media awareness campaign, put out by the government, which included television, radio and information booklets. Local radio stations undertook to inform people on the issues and the meaning of the five referendum questions, and various seminars and information sessions were held in Chulumani and surrounding communities.

<sup>312</sup> It might be said that this participatory aspect of Radio Yungas built on local people's collective confidence to challenge what they perceived to be social injustices. Carmela, who was Director of the radio between 1995 and 2000, spoke about how children's rights began to be recognised as a result of radio practice. A conscious decision was made by the radio to ensure that children and adults had equal rights to participation, so that children were no longer pushed to the back of the queue when waiting to make an announcement. This endowed children with both the airspace and the confidence to publicise injustices such as being hit by a teacher, an allegation that would then be investigated by the radio team.

<sup>313</sup> From its early days, the radio actively tried to promote women's participation in the public sphere, by devising a programme especially for women. Amelia worked on the first of these programmes and sees a direct causal relationship between this programme and the growth of women's confidence to participate in the public sphere: 'Before, women were very submissive. After there was this programme, they began to participate in meetings, then there were even women *dirigentes*. The Sister and Fortunata went to the communities, to their meetings, to get them to participate too. They talked about their needs, and so on.' See also Riaño (1994:159), Ruíz (1994:161-178) and Rodríguez (1994:158-160). During my fieldwork, one of the sisters from the Catholic Institute of Yungas Women (ICMY) conducted a women's programme on Thursday nights, called *Ajayu* ('spirit'). Many topics were discussed, from the Referendum to the local elections, and women were encouraged to call up from their communities to participate. Nonetheless participation on the radio remains limited among women.

<sup>314</sup> Due to the rotational leadership system within the *sindicatos*, there are of course occasions when an important and influential person within the community will not be occupying a role as *dirigente* (although it is most likely that some role or other will have been found for him). However, he is still likely to exert influence on decisions made within the community, especially where the people elected to occupy these roles are less experienced than he is. Hence, I include such people in my use of the term *dirigente*.

occupy subordinate positions and possess marginalized status within the labor movement.

(Huesca 1995:154)

He seems to call for a political economy approach that returns the focus to issues of power and social differentiation. The *corresponsal* from one of the larger towns told me that it was mostly *dirigentes* who came to speak on the participatory programmes (cf. Alfaro 2006b; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006). 'Sometimes,' she said, 'the *dirigentes* tell the grassroots not to speak. "You're going to make me look bad," they say,' demonstrating the way in which those who have it use their symbolic capital to influence or maintain the discourse that is produced in the public sphere, thereby to achieve their goals and to protect that capital. One *dirigente* speaks on the programme, *Contacto*:

As General Secretary of the Sub-Central of San Bartolomé, the concern is great... We've always gone out, Huancané and San Bartolomé, always first... We always want to defend, like good Bolivians, our natural resources. They already stole our mining... now they're going for our natural resources such as our hydrocarbons... I think we have a conscience, all the producer brothers, especially Yungueños, to fight against this outrage of the transnationals. We're going to reinforce all the brothers who are there (in the blockade), don't worry. The whole Province, the Provincial Federation of Chulumani has decided to march out to La Paz. We are going to fulfil this. That is an instruction... I would like please for all of us to come, to assume this responsibility of uniting and fighting together for a better Bolivia, for a better future for our children, brother Sabino.

With this, the *dirigente* uses the symbolic capital he has, as both the leader of an important *cocalero sindicato* as well as a recently elected member of local government, to assume the authority to dominate the airwaves for several minutes and in that time, to work to swing the viewpoints of his 'producer brothers' into line with his own. As a necessary part of the process of what he hopes will be successful persuasion, he works to further accrue symbolic capital for himself by reiterating his important position as General Secretary, for his community by stressing that they are always the first to join the march, and for the Yungueño producers, as a united group with a conscience and a legitimate cause.

However, it is not the *dirigente* alone who is responsible, although he would like to be, for the multiple ways in which his message is received and transfigured, mediated, adapted and refuted, in the coca fields, on the road, on the *kachi*, at home (cf. Scannell 1991:3; Tacchi 1998:43; 2000:293). As his words enter into the social contexts of each of these places, it is the listeners, the listener-narrowcasters and the listener-narrowcaster-broadcasters who listen to, narrow and broadcast his message back into the communicative ecosystem, exchanged, misinterpreted, endorsed. 'Is there really no corruption anymore?! As if!' 'The President of Chile said they're going to return the sea.' 'How can they go and complain? That bloody radio too! They go there to

complain about everything and nothing!' Receivers become senders and vice versa (cf. Servaes 2007; Spitulnik 2002), and as they do so, the broadcaster accrues and loses capital according to the successfulness of his attempts to communicate the value of his capital in a way that it might be (mis)recognised and accepted as such by the other players in the coca *field* (Crisell 1986:199). And these exchanges, misinterpretations and endorsements do not occur in isolation, but in connection with and within the confines of the ecosystem of coca communications, each member of the family putting to use the resources that he or she is able to draw on (interpersonal networks, television, courses, newspaper), to make these conversions of information and capital.

## Insiders and Outsiders: Radio Yungas as Platform for the Struggle over Material and Cultural Production

The primary task of the United States is to destabilise the *cocaleros*. We must absolutely defend the coca leaf, because it is a part of our identity.

(Ex-*dirigente* of CONFECAY<sup>315</sup>, *Contacto*, Radio Yungas)

The communicative space that Radio Yungas creates is utilised by those who have the symbolic capital to do so within the coca *field*, to work to construct and maintain a group identity founded upon an insider-outsider relationship, a relationship which is characterised by the historical and continuing power struggles over material and cultural production. The speaker above, interviewed on Radio Yungas, sets up an oppositional insider-outsider relationship between the United States and the *cocaleros*, which is precisely structured around those two struggles: over material production ('the coca leaf') and cultural production ('our identity'). He goes on to demonstrate what he considers to be historical continuity of insider-outsider power tussles:

During the time of the *patrones*, there were no rules, but they tried to have monopolies. Now they have tried in California to cultivate coca, but it didn't work. They want to monopolise this product. It shows that here, we have a certain power, to make some derivatives, etc.<sup>316</sup>

As discussed, it is the *dirigentes*, those who are in the best position within the coca *field*, who are most likely to make use of the radio waves for broadcasting purposes. Those individuals who are most successful (although never uncontested) in their attempts to convert economic to cultural and social capital (educated, savvy, well positioned within the *field*) and further to symbolic capital (through charisma and eloquence), assume representation of the *cocaleros* and in fact Yungueños

---

<sup>315</sup> CONFECAY (*Consejo de Federaciones Campesinas de los Yungas de La Paz*, Council of *Campesino* Federations of the Yungas of La Paz) is the umbrella organisation of the different coca growers' organisations of the Yungas.

<sup>316</sup> See Harris (1995:106), who writes of the construction of continuity between the Spanish and the 'gringos' as plunderers.

as a united whole, both to themselves and to outsiders, and take on the role of working to accrue symbolic capital for the group by constructing and legitimating cultural cohesiveness. In fact, if this imagined group were not brought into existence symbolically, it would not exist at all (Bourdieu 1986:252), for coca growers are certainly not without factional divisions, and more to the point, not all Yungueños are coca growers.<sup>317</sup> Through addressing their perceived listenership as 'Yungueños,' 'cocaleros' or '*productores de coca*', in other words, as one homogenous group united through coca, these leaders work to create an 'imagined (Yungas) community' (Anderson 1983) that we could perhaps refer to as 'imagined social capital', in the sense that members (radio listeners, the Radio Yungas family) are able to imagine social connections and social networks with all other members of the 'community', without ever having met them (cf. Crisell 1986:202). Here, the *Federación*<sup>318</sup> Executive's unifying and victorious message goes out across the radio waves from the site of a blockade following the signing of an agreement with the government:

Companions and brothers, a round of applause for all of us. *Jallalla* (long live) the coca producers!! (The audience respond, '*Jallalla!!!*') Viva the unity of the three Federations of the Provinces of Nor and Sur Yungas and Inquisivi. ('*Viva!!!*') *Adelante* (onwards) for the Yungas!! ('*Adelanteeee!!!*').<sup>319</sup>

With this, he creates and perpetuates the myth of *cocalero* unity by glossing over the internal disparities between sparring factions, and presents the 'imagined community' both to itself and, he hopes, to the wider communicative ecosystem, for the national media will, no doubt, also be covering this story (cf. Harris 1995:111).<sup>320</sup> During times of conflict, it becomes all the more important to accrue, through communication of the unified nature of the group, powerful symbolic capital (cf. Huesca 1995:153).<sup>321</sup> One catechist expresses this when he laments a lost opportunity to communicate the Yungueños' solidarity on a global scale after a botched plan for catechists to join the march during Easter.

The news would have gone out on a global level that this time, yes, the Yungueño brothers made ourselves felt.

The project of unification and identity construction undertaken by prominent members of the Yungas 'community' is aided by the Radio Yungas institution itself, with the support of *Claridad*.

---

<sup>317</sup> Bourdieu (1986:252) writes, 'Everything combines to cause the signifier to take the place of the signified, the spokesmen that of the group he is supposed to express, not least because his distinction, his "outstandingness," his visibility constitute the essential part, if not the essence of this power, which, being entirely set within the logic of knowledge and acknowledgement, is fundamentally a symbolic power; but also because the representative, the sign, the emblem, may be, and create, the whole reality of groups which receive effective social existence only in and through representation.'

<sup>318</sup> *Federación Provincial Unica de Trabajadores Campesinas de Sud Yungas* (Sole Provincial Federation of *Campesino* Workers of Sur Yungas).

<sup>319</sup> Radio Yungas reporters relayed this message from the blockade site live using a mobile phone. The line was often broken and the words indecipherable. Reporters at blockade sites would make periodic mobile telephone calls to the radio station to provide updates on events. This blockade site was close enough to La Paz to receive mobile phone reception.

<sup>320</sup> Harris (1995:111) writes that 'cultural creativity' can be a 'quite self-conscious affair, and articulated as such by the agents of cultural transformation.'

<sup>321</sup> Huesca (1995:153) notes how 'miners' radio stations have been most open and accessible at times when the social structure has been most repressive.' and quotes a worker at Radio Pío XII as saying, 'It is in the unfortunate moments of despair that the people are quite in solidarity' (Huesca 1995:160).



Staff members and administrators work to foster a sense of 'Yungueño-ness' and solidarity by calling for donations for an unfortunate Yungueño *hermano* (brother) or *compañero* (comrade) suffering from an illness or an accident, or more explicitly during times of civil unrest:<sup>322</sup>

Radio Yungas reproaches and emphatically condemns the stance of the government in their use of force in the dismantling of the blockade, and calls for the unity of the *dirigentes* and of all the Yungueños.

(Radio Yungas Director)

Blockaders, who despite being predominantly coca growers, include shopkeepers, school teachers, town councillors and all other social groups, are referred to by the homogenising label, '*cocaleros*' or '*productores de coca*' by both La Paz-based mainstream media, and by Radio Yungas staff and participants. While the former might be due to a simplification of the issue by a press distanced from the empirical reality of the situation, it seems in the latter's case, an attempt is being made, sometimes consciously and at other times less so, to portray this somewhat disunified group as unified and homogeneous, and therefore more powerful in opposition to the enemy (the government and foreign interests) that attacks that which unites them (coca). The work of actively strengthening an identity founded around cultural traditions and around coca can be identified in events such as Radio Yungas' 26<sup>th</sup> birthday party, during which all communities possessing radio *cajitas* were invited to perform a traditional dance of their choice in a parade through Chulumani. Radio presenters commentated the parade live, and named the different communities that formed a part of the united Yungas community as they arrived in the central plaza. The commentator, weaving through the parade with a microphone, proclaimed:

This is our culture, it's our dance. And this is how our Yungueña culture is. That is how the Yungueña women move, that is how the musical instruments are played. The dance groups, the autochthonous groups, our *wiphala*<sup>323</sup>, the traditional dance, here in the 26 years of Radio Yungas.

Here, the presenter defines the Yungueña culture, excludes groups who cannot lay claim to it (it is 'our culture, our dance'), and at the same time encompasses all of this within the Radio Yungas institution, buying further symbolic capital for the radio, and on the side, for himself who, incidentally, is not Yungueño at all, but from La Paz. Listeners are conscious of the radio's work in identity construction, as demonstrated by one man at the eighteenth *encuentro de comunidades* (meeting of communities), an event held in a different community each year and at which the different communities present a traditional dance. Radio Yungas broadcast the event live, and one

---

<sup>322</sup> Chambi Cari likewise identified this explicit process in the work of Radio Yungas staff, especially with the focus of defence of the coca leaf: 'In the case of Radio Yungas, there can be observed the permanent work aimed at emitting messages that not only form links among *cocaleros*, but also mobilise, and permit the channelling of the protests and demands of the coca producers' (Chambi Cari 1997:81).

<sup>323</sup> Bolivia's indigenous flag. See Lopez (n.d.) for a history of the *wiphala*.

staff member was presented with a memento and thanked by the organising committee ‘...very affectionately for the arduous work, for the selfless work that (the staff members and the radio) do in communicating, and for the arduous work that they do in integrating the communities, for the arduous work they do in pursuing our culture and our tradition...’

It is through a long tradition of such work, of being involved in such events, and of actively working to defend the *cocaleros* during times of political unrest, that the radio station itself has been able to become a representation of Yungueño culture and Yungueño resistance to both material and cultural acts of sabotage by outsiders: to accrue symbolic capital as a trustworthy and disinterested institution, as a ‘radio of the *campesinos*’ and a space for the ‘voz de los sin voz’ (‘voice of the voiceless’). It is particularly through acts of solidarity during marches and blockades that the radio builds credit for itself, or loses it if the institution is deemed not to be doing enough in support of the coca growers. Carmela, a former Director of Radio Yungas, remembers the role that the radio had played during the government’s attempted eradication operation in 2001. People used the *cajitas* to communicate between the different areas, and to let people know where the soldiers were and when they would be arriving in a certain place. At the same time, they encouraged people to move the soldiers on when they arrived in their area. In this way, local people were able to coordinate to march the soldiers back out along the road to La Paz, and no attempt at eradication has been made since. The government criticised the radio for fomenting an uprising, and the radio received threats. In this instance, said the ex-director, the radio served to rally together all the different, often conflicting, groups within the Yungas against a common enemy. ‘At this time,’ she said, ‘they were Yungueños.’ Such acts build the symbolic capital of the radio as an institution ‘for the *cocaleros*.’ Yungueños also remember how the station was brought under military control the day following Luis García Meza’s coup in 1980 (cf. Chambi Cari 1997:50).<sup>324</sup> Amelia, who worked as the radio’s secretary as a young woman, remembers:

Everyone else escaped, but I was there with the money. They aimed a gun at me, and I fainted. I woke up in the Hospital, I think. The military took over the radio – they said it was against the government. After that, they checked over all the programmes in the military barracks before allowing them to go on air... It wasn’t in the interests of the government that the *campesinos* listen to the radio. They informed them of everything, woke them up.

Such memories prompt local people to surround the radio and its antenna during times of political unrest, such as occurred in October 2003, briefly before Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada’s forced resignation, and cement the radio’s position as ‘for the *campesinos*’, and against the outsiders. One long-time staff member said, ‘Radio Yungas, it’s quiet one day, two days, the people go crazy

---

<sup>324</sup> See Chambi Cari (1997:50), who writes that Radio Yungas was closed for three weeks, and later re-opened, but under total censorship of contents by the military authorities installed in Chulumani’s barracks. He also writes that Radio Yungas staff members found an alternative way to inform local people of the political situation, social movements and repressive acts occurring in the country, by travelling to the communities and informing people directly. See also O’Connor (1990; 2004) on interference with the miners’ radio stations during this period. O’Connor (1990:105) writes that ‘the existence of the radio station itself seemed an important symbol’.

in the *campo*. It's quiet for a week, there are marches here in the plaza. Would it be because we instilled this in them? That it's the radio of the *campesinos*. They feel it's their radio.'

It is into this scenario, and this insider-outsider dichotomy, that certain outsiders bravely enter, taking to the Radio Yungas microphone in an attempt to use this powerful medium to influence discourse (cf. Anonymous n.d.:3; Chambi Cari 1997:53-4).<sup>325</sup> The discourse that is continually constructed and reconstructed over the Radio Yungas airwaves, while one of contestation and disparity, nonetheless works within certain parameters as, being the dominant discourse within the ecosystem of coca communications, it has been internalised and is guided by the collective habitus of those who are connected through coca (cf. Crisell 1986:199). Outsiders attempt to strategically work within the discourse, in order to put their particular message across. So the health-oriented NGO *Servir* uses the radio to communicate its schedule of visits for Chulumani and Irupana without mentioning that it is funded by USAID, and the government's mobile drug enforcement unit, UMOPAR<sup>326</sup>, broadcast the following message repeatedly around the time that a violently opposed military base was being constructed on the road between La Paz and Chulumani:

We do not come to eradicate. We work with interdiction. No to drugs, yes to health. A message from the Mobile Rural Area Patrol Unit.<sup>327</sup>

This organisation, which epitomises outsiders in that its whole purpose is the opposition of the coca leaf, stealthily attempts to work with and within the discourse, aiming to rally support for the military base by stressing that its purpose is not eradication and that, in fact, the base is to be used as a hospital rather than a checkpoint. It is careful not to use the acronym UMOPAR in the announcement, using instead the lesser known extended name of the unit. However, the dominant discourse is not one that will be so easily altered, and here perhaps the idea of 'reinforcement theory' can be taken on board, where audiences are seldomly consciously persuaded, either because they have already been prejudiced at a deeper, ideological level or because they are instinctively resistant to overt attempts to influence them...' (Crisell 1986:199). Add to this the organisation's low level of symbolic capital and their past performances, and it is not surprising that they are simply not believed by the coca growers who, despite the plea, continue to blockade and destroy the base.

---

<sup>325</sup> Chambi Cari (1997:53-54) and Anonymous (n.d.:3) write about how those involved with the ill-fated Agroyungas project attempted to control the cultural production that occurred through Radio Yungas, seeing that the discourse emanating out of the radio was one that would detract from their stock of symbolic and social capital. Radio Yungas reflected the people's criticisms and suspicions of the project in their broadcasting, placing at risk the project's ability to continue with its work and to recruit more communities into the project. In response, the Agroyungas project attempted what these writers refer to as bribery of the radio: 'The project even tried to bribe the station to change its critical and independent line, with the offering of new and more powerful equipment, a proposal that was rejected, which provoked a greater identification of the Yungas *campesino* with the radio' (Anonymous n.d.:3; cf. Chambi Cari 1997:54).

<sup>326</sup> The UMOPAR (*Unidad Móvil de Patrullaje Rural*, Mobile Rural Area Patrol Unit) is the uniformed interdiction force of the FELCN (*Fuerza Especial de Lucha Contra el Narcotráfico*, Special Force for the Fight Against Narcotics Trafficking). They carry out manual coca eradication, and receive training and equipment from the United States (CIP 1999).

<sup>327</sup> One staff member, who must have been unaware of this announcement, told me how the radio analyses and vets the advertisements to be broadcast on the radio and said, 'We can't put on an advert for UMOPAR, for example, because it is against the vision of the radio. We only give space to businesses that provide some help, some orientation. The idea is not to divide the *campesinos*, but unite them. That's the idea of the radio.'

There are several factors that have permitted Radio Yungas to become and to continue to be the coca growers' radio, the 'Yungueños' radio, and that have facilitated the creation of a common identity of the Radio Yungas ('*cocalero*') family. One has to do with the express intentions of those who initiated the radio and those who currently administrate and operate it. Another has to do with the nature of radio itself, which makes it highly compatible with the ecosystem of coca communications, as discussed. And a third has to do with the relative control that coca growers have over the mode of coca production. While there are certain individuals who are better placed to participate on radio programmes, it is coca growers as a group who have the economic surplus, accrued through coca production, to fund the radio, and who are thereby able to exert a certain symbolic, if not legal, ownership over the medium, as demonstrated earlier through the ways in which the staff must respond to their demands. They, together with radio staff, control the discourse within already defined parameters, so that over the radio waves UMOPAR is condemned, the Mayor is asked to provide documentation accounting for the whereabouts of donated money, and an NGO is asked to explain why operations are not going ahead as promised. In a cyclical pattern, the cultural production that occurs across the radio waves, which is guided by the idiosyncrasies of the material (coca) production system as made clear, in turn has reverberations within that material production system. In this way, as a unified (imagined) Yungueño identity is constructed and strengthened, perhaps contributing to a government concession that is favourable to the *cocaleros*, this group's power over the coca production system is strengthened. Since 2004, *cocaleros* have entered into local government for the first time, a *cocalero* has been elected as President of the country, and coca commercialisation laws have become less restrictive, with exportation and industrialisation more promisingly on the agenda.



**FIGURE 24: Listening to the radio whilst drying coca.** (Photo by author, June 2005).

NOTE: This figure is included on page 220 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

**FIGURE 25: Listening to the radio whilst peeling coffee beans.** (Photo by author, June 2005).

NOTE: This figure is included on page 221 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

**FIGURE 26: Baby guarding the radio while his parents weed the coca field.** (Photo by author, April 2005).

NOTE: This figure is included on page 221 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

**FIGURE 27: Boy with radio and popcorn in a Yungas community.** (Reproduced with permission from Cristian Mendoza, June 2005).



## Conclusion

It is the very nature of radio, able to be transported into all the spaces that form part of a person's daily life (Spitulnik 2002; Tacchi 1998), relatively cost-efficient and therefore able to be supported economically by the community, not requiring literacy for use, and able to be used bi-directionally and dialogically, just as Brecht (2006) would have hoped (cf. Contreras Baspineiro 2000b; Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:15-16), that makes it such an important and, for many actors within the Yungas, strategic communications medium. This chapter has stressed the need to take a political economy approach in order to understand the processes that occur when different actors use the radio to achieve their goals, while others are somehow prohibited from doing so.

Radio Yungas has, since its inception, been set up as a radio for the *campesinos*; as a 'voz de los sin voz', and has over the years accrued symbolic capital within the coca *field* as an institution that disinterestedly represents and defends the rights of the coca growers. As such, it is the coca growers who symbolically own the station and the communicative spaces that it provides. Different groups and individuals, including outsiders to the coca production system, the radio administrators, the staff members, the *corresponsales* and those members of the 'Radio Yungas family' who listen, narrowcast and broadcast, all work to somehow contribute to cultural production both *through* and *for* the accumulation of symbolic capital for themselves or the group they represent. Ultimately, their success at influencing cultural production in the way that they hoped, is owed to the capital they already possess within the *field*, as producers or non producers, owners of land, *sindicato* leaders and so on, as well as their skill in converting that capital to a virtue that is symbolically valued and (mis)recognised. They must work within the discourse, utilising their knowledge of the communicative context in which their message will be heard, mediated and transformed (Scannell 1991:3).

As a *dirigente* calls his yungueño brothers to unity, or a landowning woman from Asunta calls for extra workers, they are using the capital they possess to influence cultural production that will in turn have consequences for material production relations. As an imagined Yungueño community is constructed (Anderson 1983), and the *dirigente's* symbolic capital accrues, as the woman communicates her position in the field and catalyses intra-Yungueño migration, she contributes to the altering of work practices and the shifting of social categories and he, if he plays his cards right, places one stepping stone on the path to greater freedom in coca commercialisation, industrialisation and exportation. Radio Yungas facilitates these processes because it is deeply embedded and an integral element in today's ecosystem of coca communications, connecting vastly distant Yungas communities to each other, as well as connecting these communities, albeit in a limited way, to the wider global communicative ecosystem.

## 6 THE INTERNET TELECENTRE: TALES OF AN INTRODUCED SPECIES



**FIGURE 28:** Chulumani's Internet telecentre, with sign reading: 'The New Technologies in Everybody's Reach.' (Photo by author, June 2005).

The campesinos will need to look up information on the Internet about how to better their agricultural products, and so on.

(Coordinator, NGO *Vida*)

We don't know about Internet. We tend to dedicate ourselves more to coca.

(Coca-grower, Yungas community)



**FIGURE 29: Making use of the telecentre.** (Photo by author, February 2004).

## Introduction

It is a sunny day in Chulumani and Carolina lounges against the doorframe of the new telecentre, catching some warming rays and watching the town shuffle by. 'Doña Carmen', she nods to the robust old woman who is in no hurry on the way back to her shop after buying fresh bread from Doña Lucia. Carolina, a young and hip Afro-Bolivian woman from a small community, has been employed to supervise the telecentre after getting to know the NGO's Director in the town disco. It is a dull job. She has studied to be an architect in La Paz. But she will have to make do with this for now.

A small man, on his way to being elderly, approaches the telecentre hesitantly. He wears a brown woollen vest over a blue long-sleeved shirt, long pants and peaked cap. On his feet are *abarcas*, the sandals made from rubber tyre that are the trademark of the *campesino* population. The sharp features inherited from his indigenous forebears are etched across his swarthy face. He must be on his way to somewhere, or has come to Chulumani for some important business; he is not from the town. He seems almost apologetic when he asks Carolina, 'Excuse me Señorita, the classes you have advertised... can anyone attend?' She does not shift her gaze from the passers-by when she replies, 'They're full.' 'Thank you Señorita, that's all I wanted to ask you', says the man softly, before sidling away and disappearing from view and from Carolina's life. Carolina has told the truth; the classes are indeed full. And certainly that man will not return to the telecentre.

This case study of an Internet telecentre sits alongside that of the radio station, Radio Yungas (see Chapter Five), in attempting to demonstrate how the relations of cultural production, manifested in this case through an individual or groups' access to, mode of use and ownership of a communicative medium within a communicative ecosystem, is cyclically related to and dependent upon the relations of material production of the area. The nature of the Internet as a medium, as well as the way in which this particular telecentre project was implemented, meant that both the medium and the centre itself became incorporated into the ecosystem of coca communications along particular lines of that metaphoric spider's web, lines along which some travelled (physically and socially) and others did not. This led to a system of inclusions and exclusions that ran largely along lines of labour division, and therefore, as discussed in Chapter Three, along 'thought' lines of class and, by consequence, ethnicity (cf. Spedding 1994; Rivera 1994). A person's position within the coca *field*, as designated through his or her situation in terms of labour practices, land ownership, social capital, participation within local organisational institutions, and exchange practices (See Chapter Three), has a direct relationship to his or her capacity to access and use the Internet telecentre.

I will begin by placing the discussion within a broader context, giving an overview of the development of the telecentre globally, as well as discussing the national and international policy

framework within which this project is embedded. I will then move on to give a brief outline of the history of this particular telecentre project, paying attention to its stated aims and the expectations it aroused in local people. The second section will deal with the uses to which the telecentre and the Internet were put by those who accessed them. Theoretically, those who visited the telecentre found themselves at the open door to a vast, global, communicative ecosystem (cf. Appadurai 1996; Castells 2004; Lash 2002), yet they chose to access this in a very limited way. People used the Internet to maintain and strengthen existing social networks, both through emailing and 'chatting' with friends in La Paz, and through the social interaction that occurred within the space of the telecentre itself (cf. Powell 2007; Slater and Tacchi 2004). Through these interactions, both on-line and off-line, and in conjunction with other media such as the telephone, they worked to maintain and accrue social capital, cultural capital through the accumulation of computing skills, and symbolic capital as they converted these and the economic capital that facilitated their access in the first place, into something recognisable, or *misrecognisable* to others in the *field* (Bourdieu 1977:171), for when a child displays both her presumed computing competence and the strength of her social networks by loudly exiting the telecentre with her friends, this is also a tacit and perhaps unconscious display of the economic wealth, and therefore power, of her family, as part of the local elite.

The third and final section will demonstrate the role of the relations of coca production in causing access to be differentiated along class and ethnic 'thought' lines (Barnes 1954), by reviewing who is in a position to or chooses to make use of this medium, and who is unable or unwilling to do so, and why. Several factors influence people's choice or ability to use the telecentre according to their position within the coca *field*, including their geographical location, available time, economic capital, skills and the confidence to acquire skills, perceived relevance and perceived ownership of the centre and equipment (cf. Rice 2002:107).<sup>328</sup>

Those who did not access the telecentre continued to make use of the communications media accessible to them, together with the interpersonal communication facilitated by inclusion within social networks and travel, to meet their needs and work to achieve their everyday goals. It is suggested that in this case, information reaching the Yungas via the Internet from outside the Yungas is most likely to reach the majority of the population when mediated via other elements of the communicative ecosystem, namely, the radio and word of mouth. The telecentre served a function, yet not the function it set out to serve according to the project proposal, that of 'diminishing the digital divide', and 'achieving a better citizenship participation and a sustainable rural development' aimed specifically at the '*campesinos*, indigenous, colonisers and social organisations of rural Bolivia' (Ribera 2003:4). In fact, the project was largely irrelevant for the majority of people in the Yungas and, as will be elaborated upon in the following chapter, did nothing to redress the inequalities that local people feel have characterised their relationship with

---

<sup>328</sup> Rice (2002:107) draws on a number of studies to outline various barriers to Internet usage, among them lack of access, lack of interest, lack of skills, feelings of intimidation inspired by the new technology, especially among older people and especially after a bad first experience, lack of user-friendliness and unattractive style (eg. UCLA 2000).

outsiders for the past five hundred years. If anything, it served to reproduce these, through differentiating use along labour, class and ethnic lines, and through incorporating users into the wider communicative ecosystem on largely unequal terms and in a subordinate relationship to actors external to the coca production system (cf. Castells 1996; 2004).

## The Internet Telecentre: The Birth of a Revolutionary

### A Brief History of the Global Telecentre 'Revolution'

Early on in the global blossoming of 'new' information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet, it became apparent that the benefits of these were only being felt by those already living most comfortably in the world, and the notion came about of a 'digital divide' which separated those who had access to these technologies, and thereby to the information and knowledge accessible via these, from those who did not (Richardson 1997a:7; cf. Castells 1996; 2004; Lash 2002; Rossells et al. 2004; Sassen 1999; Wilson and Best 2004; Wilson et al. 2005; Younis 2005). In 1997, Richardson wrote for the FAO<sup>329</sup>:

Today we truly live in a global village, but it is a village with elite information 'haves' and many information 'have-nots'. With the new technologies available to us we have an opportunity to change this.<sup>330</sup>

(Richardson 1997b)

It was and is believed that more equitable access to ICTs would lead to a reduction in social and economic inequalities (Bolivian Government et al. 2003:4; Galperin 2005; Gigler 2001; Hudson 2002:371; Latchem and Walker 2001a:vii; Richardson 1997a:72; Robinson n.d.; United Nations Millenium Project 2005:xiii), and that this would have implications in terms of democratic participation and the creation of opportunities in sectors such as agriculture, education, health and business, all of which should lead to the alleviation of poverty (van der Krogt 2005:3). Gigler (2001:37) writes that the Internet is a 'powerful tool' that will provide a "digital bridge" out of poverty'. As a space that facilitates access to computers, the Internet, and perhaps telephone and fax to populations otherwise bereft of these technologies, much has been made of the Internet *telecentre's* potential for reducing the breadth of the 'digital divide' (Carvin and Surman 2006; Commonwealth of Learning 2001; Oestmann and Dymond 2001; Robinson n.d.).<sup>331</sup> So much so, that when inaugurating Irupana's new telecentre in October 2004, *Claridad's* Director stated boldly

---

<sup>329</sup> United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation.

<sup>330</sup> The concept of the 'global village' was coined by McLuhan (1988) and has been critiqued by many. See Hirst and Harrison (2007:53-55) and Slater (2002:535).

<sup>331</sup> Commonwealth of Learning (2001:2) write, 'Telecentres act as an equaliser, allowing the disadvantaged to log onto a world of opportunity.'



that there had been three great revolutions: the progression from the hand-plow to the tractor, the advent of communications media, and finally, the telecentre (cf. Carvin and Surman 2006).<sup>332</sup>

Since the first experiments with this concept in Sweden in the mid-1980s (Oestmann and Dymond 2001:3), telecentres have sprung up in urban and rural areas all around the world, so that today there are likely to be hundreds of thousands of telecentres, run by governments, community organisations, the private sector and grassroots technology activists (Carvin and Surman 2006:14-15).<sup>333</sup> Some of these are documented as having brought positive developments to local people (Carvin and Surman 2006; Konstadakopulos 2005; Slater and Tacchi 2004; Warnock and Wickremasinghe 2005), while others have been less successful or have been unsustainable (cf. Gigler 2001:36; Oestmann and Dymond 2001; Slater and Tacchi 2004). In recent years, accumulated experience and the understandings gained through projects that have done little to contribute to a better life for those involved, have led scholars and practitioners to argue that there is more to be taken into account than just connectivity (cf. Buckingham 2002:86; Commonwealth of Learning 2001; Contreras Baspineiro 2000a; 2000b; Córdova 2003:74; Gómez and Martínez 2001; Haseloff 2005; Martin-Barbero 2006:918-9; Powell 2007; van Oeyen 2003:51).<sup>334</sup> Gumucio-Dagron has written:

The 'digital divide' is a social divide, an economic divide, a cultural divide and a political divide... Haven't I mentioned a 'technological divide'? It is on purpose, because I believe this is the least important issue if the others are not taken into consideration. In the end, the technological gap will be easily bridged because it is market driven. If the market expands in developing countries, hardware and software companies will be glad to intervene, as they are doing already. However, if we are looking at ICTs supporting sustainable social development, access to computers is far from being the answer.

(Gumucio-Dagron 2003:1)<sup>335</sup>

Gumucio-Dagron (2003, 2004a) lists five elements that are essential to any communications initiative: 1) community ownership of the project, 2) generation of local and socioculturally relevant content, requiring the training of local staff (cf. Balaji et al. n.d.:8; Haseloff 2005:4; Oestman and Dymond 2001:6), 3) use of appropriate technologies, 4) locally appropriate convergence of old and new technologies, and 5) use of local languages and cultures. Importantly, it must be recognised that communication is more about process than access and must involve dialogue and participation

---

<sup>332</sup> Carvin and Surman (2006:88) refer to telecentres as a new revolution, as well as referring to an Internet revolution (ibid.:49), a global knowledge revolution (ibid.:53) and a media revolution (ibid.:61). Others have written of an information revolution (Swaminathan 2005).

<sup>333</sup> Commonwealth of Learning (2001:2) write that the telecentre movement began in Scandinavia in the 1980s before spreading to North and South America, Europe, Africa and Australasia. See also Carvin and Surman (2006:14).

<sup>334</sup> Héctor Córdova, Pro-Rector of the Catholic University of Bolivia in La Paz, writes, 'for ICTs to be favourable to social coexistence depends on their being understood as aids and not orderers of society, which is possible if the political character of their use is recognised' (Córdova 2003:74).

<sup>335</sup> These comments were made as part of his Keynote address for the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva in 2003.

(cf. CRIS Bolivia 2003:39; Hamelink 2006:962; Kluitenberg 2006:964). I will address these points with reference to the case study at hand.

### **The Bolivian Telecentre and its Authors within National and International Policy Frameworks**

In September 2000, representatives of governments around the world met in New York and agreed, as part of the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015, to 'in cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies' (United Nations Millennium Project 2005:xiii). Since that time, the Bolivian government, along with representatives of the private sector and civil society, have been working toward a national strategy for Information and Communication Technologies for development.

In 2001, a study for the International Telecommunication Union, noting that Bolivia and Paraguay had the lowest penetration of personal computers in South America (ITU 2001:11),<sup>336</sup> recommended that 'the Bolivian government embrace the Internet and the development of ICT as a top item on the policy agenda' (ibid.:43).<sup>337</sup> The authors advocated telecommunications market liberalisation, Internet-friendly tariffs and the formulation of a policy for universal Internet access that would promote shared access from public locations (ibid.:42-3; cf. Rossells et al. 2004:176).<sup>338</sup> They suggested that the establishment of a National Task Force would facilitate the improved coordination of isolated initiatives in order to 'avoid wasteful duplication and enhance the deployment of ICT infrastructure and services in the country' (ITU 2001:45).

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2003, a project document was approved by the Bolivian Vice-Presidency, the Bolivian government's Agency for the Development of the Information Society in Bolivia (ADSIB)<sup>339</sup>, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which stated that 'to speed up the reduction of the digital divide in Bolivia, it is necessary to have a national strategy for the opportune and effective development of ICTs in the country' (Bolivian Government et al. 2003:4). These concerns, however, were up-staged by the violent events of 'Black October' (*Octubre negro*) that left over seventy people dead, and when the seminar that had been scheduled for around this

---

<sup>336</sup> Bolivia was estimated to have 80 000 Internet users, or less than one per cent of the population (ITU 2001:13). Figures were estimated for the beginning of 2000. There was no official data or known market surveys (ibid.).

<sup>337</sup> The study undertaken on the state of the Internet in Bolivia was conducted as part of a series of Internet case studies for the International Telecommunications Union (2001). The authors expressed concern about the Bolivian government's lack of awareness of the potential for the Internet to be used as a key development tool and write, 'Lack of attention to the potential offered by this new technology to fight poverty and enhance economic development might increase the internal and external knowledge and wealth gap and leave the country in an even more difficult situation than what it faces at the turn of the century' (ibid.:37).

<sup>338</sup> 'Universal access' in this sense refers to the ICT being accessible to a person in one way or another, whether it be at a public centre or at a neighbour's home, as opposed to 'universal service' which would describe a scenario in which each family had the ICT in their home (cf Hudson 2002:372).

<sup>339</sup> ADSIB is an autonomous body beneath the Bolivian Vice-Presidency, created in March 2002 through the Law 26553. It is in charge of 'proposing policies, implementing strategies and coordinating actions oriented to reducing the digital divide in the country' (ADSIB 2007; cf. Castillo 2003:59).

time in preparation for December's World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS)<sup>340</sup> was finally held in La Paz in November, it was with a renewed vision of the socially just and democratic ends to which the new technologies might be put, that the various communications experts and practitioners seemed to speak.<sup>341</sup>

The seminar was entitled, 'Bolivia, Construction of Democracy and the Information Society' and participants included representatives of the government, UNDP, academia, the media and various NGOs and civil society organisations. Rodolfo Castillo, Director of ADSIB, said that Bolivia needed a vision for 2010, which might include 8.5 million Bolivians (the country's population) having access to the Internet, and all towns, Universities, schools, hospitals and health centres having Internet connections. He spoke of an Information Society that was an association between 'government, the productive sector, and citizens' and which contributed solutions toward the current situation of social exclusion, the economic and productive crisis, and the inefficiency and corruption of the government. This society was inclusive of gender, age, ethnicity, culture and language.<sup>342</sup> Better communication between the people and the government, and between the public and private sectors, would lead to greater democracy.

It was interesting, however, that, as pointed out by several of the participants, there was not a lot of communication taking place at this seminar between the 'people' and the government or, in fact, between the 'people' and the communications practitioners who profess to serve or facilitate communication for those 'people'. Those in attendance wore suits, the auditorium was flashy, the seats were comfortable and the refreshments aristocratic. A journalist told the floor:

The indigenous journalists won't be here. Because they are elsewhere. Theirs is another field, other languages, another reality. They weren't invited, and I don't think they would feel invited.

It was at this seminar and in this context that I first met the Director of NGO *Alma*, a La-Paz-based organisation working with telecentres in the Yungas region. When I mentioned that I was thinking of

---

<sup>340</sup> The World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS) was held in Geneva in December 2003. See Browne (2004), Best et al. (2004), Klein (2004) and Gumucio-Dagron (2005) for reflections on the summit.

<sup>341</sup> In October 2003, over seventy people were shot dead in La Paz's neighbouring city of El Alto by the Bolivian military, who were under orders of then President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada (cf. Kohl and Farthing 2006). The people were protesting against the government's hydrocarbons policy, which afforded great benefits to multinational exploration companies. (See Chapter Two.) The following quotes give an indication of the tone of the seminar and the role that the participants imagined communications should play in the (re)construction of democracy and justice in Bolivia: 'Goni had weapons. The people only had one weapon: the word' (Andrés Gómez, ERBOL). 'The journalists cried. Because we are human beings. We have to humanise communication. The people had a stick, a stone, and they fought against fire arms. The voices said, "They are killing us". And the streets of La Paz, so peaceful. They were two completely separate worlds. We have to speak from the voices of the excluded. They have no access to participation in communication' (Lucia Sauma, Radio Pachamama). 'BOLPRESS is a space of alternative dissemination of news via the Internet, to contribute to democratisation... We have changed, we have taken a position... the defence of life' (Osvaldo Calle, BOLPRESS).

<sup>342</sup> The term 'Information Society' is thought to have originated in the 1960s in Japan (Henten and Skouby 2002:322) and is used today to describe a world that is awash, apparently on a much larger scale than in previous times, with the flows of information, the movement, transfer and processing of which is facilitated in large part by information and communication technologies (Webster 2002:22). Castillo (2003:59) seems unsure as to whether ADSIB's mission is to 'develop the Information Society in Bolivia' or the 'insertion of Bolivia in the Information Society' (presumably something originating elsewhere). CRIS Bolivia (2003:6), in the introduction to the conference proceedings of the precursors to the seminar described above, write that 'A country like Bolivia has to look to... construct an Information and Communication Society that respects and reinforces its identity as a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual country'.

living in Chulumani for a year, he raised an eye-brow and said, 'Do you know where that *is*?' He gave me his details and told me to come past the office the following Tuesday. And so I began to work as a volunteer with this organisation that, like so many others, was riding high on the telecentre tide, while it still could, unrestricted by anything as coherent as a national strategy for the implementation of Information and Communication Technologies.<sup>343</sup>

### **Introducing a Species: The Internet Telecentre and Adaptation**

During the seven months that it functioned, from September 2003 to April 2004, Chulumani's Internet telecentre was situated not far from the town plaza and boasted four computers with Internet access for public use, and one for the administrator, who also had access to a printer, a microphone and a webcam.<sup>344</sup> The Internet connection was achieved via satellite and optic fibre (Ribera 2003:57-63). This telecentre, conceived inauspiciously in a conflictive relationship between its parent organisations, was the product of an agreement between the Dutch donor NGO *Vida* and the intermediary and administrating La Paz-based NGO *Alma*, itself the fruit of a mutinous breakaway from La Paz-based NGO *Claridad*, the administrators of Radio Yungas.<sup>345</sup> As one of *Alma*'s staff members told me triumphantly, *Claridad* had wanted to run the telecentres, 'but we beat them!!'<sup>346</sup>

The project proposal written by an *Alma* staff member to secure funding for what they envisaged as a network of 120 telecentres around Bolivia, stated that the general objective of the telecentre was 'To form rural leaders through the strengthening of management capacities, dialogue and negotiation, fundamentally of the youth and of the local organisations, using to that end an interactive information system' (ibid.:34).<sup>347</sup> Social grassroots organisations would be strengthened and community participation made more 'dynamic' as the telecentre offered 'tools that strengthen and defend the voices of indigenous groups, women's groups, *campesinos*, youths and other marginalised and exploited sectors' (ibid.:35).

---

<sup>343</sup> In November 2007, three Presidents later and over two years after the expiration of the timeline by which every country was to have a national e-strategy, as agreed upon at the WSIS conference in Geneva (Browne 2004:44), a 'National Plan of Digital Inclusion' appears to be on the brink of finally being presented by the President (see Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo and ADSIB 2007a:3). The Plan will include a 'programme of universal service and access in areas of social interest', and the installation of 2000 community telecentres in rural areas (Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo and ADSIB 2007b:1). The Plan will also include mechanisms of control to 'optimise the management of financial resources and avoid the duplication of ICT projects in the framework of the Bolivian System of Innovation' (Valle 2007:17).

<sup>344</sup> The telecentre closed down in April 2004 amid wild accusations of misconduct between the various organisations. The events that ensued, however, are not the focus of my discussion. It reopened shortly before my fieldwork ended, this time housed in the parish library, and under the administration of Chulumani's Catholic padres, with the cooperation of the Catholic University in La Paz, Universidad Católica Boliviana 'San Pablo' (UCB).

<sup>345</sup> When *Claridad*'s Director was asked to resign in 2003, he and several other of *Claridad*'s staff members retaliated by forming a new NGO, *Alma*. Of the opinion that those remaining in *Claridad*, and not the mutineers, were responsible for any wrongdoing, the co-Director of the Dutch NGO that had committed to contributing to the funding of several telecentre projects with *Claridad* decided to remain loyal to the ex-members of *Claridad* and their new NGO.

<sup>346</sup> Here is an example of what Gumucio-Dagron (2004a:4) writes about when he mentions a contest between organisations to 'connect' under-developed countries.

<sup>347</sup> The title of the project proposal was, 'Alternative Education Telecentres (Educational Rural Telecentres) (Formation and Interactive Training)', expressing an educational element that would be attractive to donors. Of the 120 planned telecentres, five were selected to be implemented first (Ribera 2003:37). The first to be implemented was the Chulumani telecentre and a second was installed in Coroico before both of these were closed in April 2004.

It stated that the telecentre would provide technical and citizenship training to young people, and that as the level of skills and knowledge increased, new jobs and self-employment opportunities would be created. The productivity of producers, tradespeople and professionals would also be raised, facilitating their better insertion into the market under more competitive conditions (Ribera 2003:34-5).<sup>348</sup> Access to more diverse sources of knowledge and information would be beneficial in areas such as health, and would permit an exchange of experiences and greater collaboration between groups and networks at the national and international levels (Ribera 2003:36). As *Alma*'s Director announced in a rousing speech to the participants of the first and only courses offered at the Chulumani telecentre by *Alma* staff members:

There will be an exchange of ideas all around the world... The ideas don't come to us because we are very illuminated, rather because we see others, we are exposed to other ideas. In that way, ideas will come to you for development projects.

After his speech, his colleague said to him approvingly, 'You sell it really well. You speak well'. Indeed, much of what was written in the project proposal was part of a marketing strategy necessary to secure funding. In a seeming contradiction to the proposal's emphasis on promoting rural leaders and defending the voices of indigenous and other marginalised groups, one *Alma* staff member outlined to me the way in which the most marginalised would feel the benefits of the telecentre only via a trickle-down effect, either of knowledge and long-term economic gain through their children, or of old computers:

We can't reach the poorest, if they're not educated, because... if we go there, they won't understand us, and there wouldn't be economic sustainability either... Indirectly, we can reach the poorest, through the others, or maybe through their children... And later, maybe in five years' time, ... we had the idea to replace the computers because the people in Chulumani will already know how to operate them well, and they'll know that the computers are obsolete. And those old computers, we'll put them in the poorer populations, because they won't realise, they won't know they're obsolete. And that way we go down, down, each time getting closer to reaching the poorest.<sup>349</sup>

As well as the correct understanding that the poorest would not attend the telecentre, this comment betrays the assumption that all those living in the communities constitute 'the poorest' who are, by definition, uneducated and will only have visited the telecentre vicariously through their children who, some way or another, *will* have been able to attend. NGO *Vida*'s notion of poverty was

---

<sup>348</sup> See de Zutter (1994:11-12) who questions the 'development myth' adopted by many state and non-governmental development organisations in the Andes, that *campesinos* must become producers for the national economy, either as a sure path to better living conditions, or as an end in itself.

<sup>349</sup> This throws up the issue, as raised by Gumucio-Dagron (2004a:7-8), of the appropriateness and sustainability of installing in a community technology that will only last a few years before being outdated. The proposal also states in one section, 'All the producers and surrounding or near communities will benefit in an indirect way, as they will relate with the activities of the populations in which the telecentres will be situated, so in that way the indirect beneficiaries will also be the families of the inhabitants of the coverage area of the project (in the First Phase), who will have the opportunity to maintain a more permanent contact with their own' (Ribera 2003:46).

broader still, the entire region seen as suffering from a shared poverty (Stichting Panfluit Bolivia 2007). Hence, a situation arises where the parent organisations each have different conceptions of what their child might achieve in its new environment, and of the nature of that environment, neither appearing to display a full appreciation of the intricate ways in which the communicative ecosystem differentiates, both between and within *pueblo* and *campo*. This discord of conceptualisation will be discussed further in the following chapter.

As will become clear throughout the chapter, more thorough needs assessment may have more clearly identified the aspirations of potential users, and uncovered the inner machinery of the communicative ecosystem. Most Yungueños in fact saw the Internet telecentre as a place where their children could go to acquire the cultural capital that would be convertible outside the coca *field*, and that would allow them to exit the agricultural cycle altogether; in other words, to climb the labour ladder out of the Yungas, out of the lower class and away from indigeneity. Rather than seeing the Internet as a tool with which to strengthen their own voices, or enhance the dynamism of their own communities (Ribera 2003), they saw it as a way of becoming other.

## **101 Uses for a Telecentre (or just a Couple)**

### **Maintaining and Extending Social Networks On-Line and Off-Line**

Ten small boys hover over three computers, hollering with glee as they witness their friends murdering enemies with machine-guns. Three girls occupy a fourth computer and are engrossed in several chat conversations at once: with their school friends back in La Paz, and with their new cyber boyfriends from yesterday. Several young men, back from La Paz for University holidays, play cards at a table as they wait for a computer, while High School girls flutter flirtatiously around them. Young Beto demands that I activate another half an hour of net games for him, but is unable to produce the cash upfront and, groaning with disgust at such inflexibility, lumps off to watch and encourage the slaughter being enacted by those of his friends whose money has not yet been exhausted.

The Internet as a new medium has come up against all manner of allegations, of replacing 'real' interpersonal relationships with virtual ones, and draining offline sociality of its communality (cf. Buckingham 2002:77; Slater 2002:536). The predominantly school-aged and town-based Internet users in Chulumani, however, used this medium in conjunction with others, to further facilitate the sociality that they were experiencing and continued to experience offline; to maintain and extend existing social networks, and to engage in highly communally interactive practices at the same time as working on their stock of social, cultural and symbolic capital (cf. Miller and Slater 2000).



The act of visiting the telecentre was in itself an important social act, and young people would shout across the plaza, 'Nos vemos en el Inter!' ('See you at the Inter(net)!'). The telecentre became a space where friendships and summer love affairs were made, cemented and destroyed (cf. Baym 2002; Benjamin 2001:77; Miller and Slater 2000; Slater 2002; Slater and Tacchi 2004:65), so that, as with radio listening (Crisell 1986:202; Spitulnik 2002:342-3), sometimes it was the very experience of using the telecentre that was important, as much as the contents.<sup>350</sup> Being included in a group of giggling girls, playing cards with the town's star football player, shouting loudly and triumphantly across the room at the friends you have just defeated at *Counter-Strike*<sup>351</sup> to ensure that all present are aware of the extent of your mastery, is all a part of building social, cultural and symbolic capital (Baym 2002:72; Buckingham 2002:80). While condemned by some as disrupting the existing social interaction that takes place among young people in the town,<sup>352</sup> others, like Magdalena who works at the bank in Chulumani, enthusiastically endorse this new development:

Those net games they give the kids there in the Internet, they're preparing them for their future... I've seen so many kids, young men who go and spend their time really well. Better than being here, not doing anything in the plaza. And instead of that, they're going to the Internet – I've seen them sitting nicely in the street, waiting for their turn, you know? So that's very positive. Very, very, very positive.

So perhaps rather than the existing offline sociality being destroyed or replaced (Buckingham 2002:77; Sassen 1999:51; Slater 2002:536), it is being relocated; taken inside and off the street, or on to that particular street corner, and energies directed (whether positively or negatively) from street soccer to netgames.<sup>353</sup> At the same time, it is being extended; those face-to-face interactions that occur on the street or in the schoolyard are now able to be stretched across distance (cf. Skuse and Cousins 2007). Most telecentre users sought in the medium of Internet, as do users of the telephone and Radio Yungas, that practical extension of face-to-face communication that is necessary to maintain and strengthen existing friend and family networks when these are dispersed, or more 'distantly' (Geertz 1989) to protect and accumulate social capital (Baym 2002:64; Miller and Slater 2000:76; Rice 2002:118-9; cf. du Toit et al. 2007; Nair et al. 2006:4;

---

<sup>350</sup> Slater and Tacchi 2004:65 write that centres act as 'hubs' that enable users to expand their social networks. This led to significant social change in their examples of telecentres in India and Bangladesh, where women who were generally restricted in their mobility and social interaction found in the telecentre a unique place where they could interact with other social groups, and where people from different ethnic and socioeconomic groups who would not normally interact, came into contact (Slater and Tacchi 2004:66-73). The young people who interacted in Chulumani's telecentre on the other hand, had other spaces, such as the plaza or the disco, where they could and did otherwise meet, meaning that the telecentre did not really contribute to any real diversifying or broadening of social networks.

<sup>351</sup> *Counter-Strike* is a popular network game that can be played alone or with multiple players, and which involves shooting down the enemy with machine guns.

<sup>352</sup> A European woman who has lived in the town for decades expressed concern that most of what children were doing in the telecentre was playing violent games. 'It's all about killing,' she said. 'The kids learn to shoot, that destruction is okay. You don't like someone, you just shoot them down.' She had tried to set up a games area with puzzles and dice games, to lure children away from the computer, but with little success.

<sup>353</sup> Baym (2002:72) writes that the Internet is not usually a substitute for interpersonal communication, as sometimes claimed, but that online and interpersonal communication can occur simultaneously, as happens here (cf. Orleans and Laney 2000 cited in Baym 2002:72). She writes that Internet use can give people the opportunity to show off to each other their knowledge and skills. Buckingham writes that contrary to popular belief, studies have found game playing not to be antisocial, and to require highly developed cognitive skills (Buckingham 2002:80-1). It does, however, tend to be highly gendered, and practised more frequently by boys than by girls, which was also the case here (Buckingham 2002:78).

Skuse and Cousins 2007; Slater and Tacchi 2004:64-74). In this way, Regina's fifteen-year-old daughter, Maria Luz, uses email and chat to communicate with her new school friends in La Paz, and the friends she leaves behind in Chulumani during term-time employ the same medium to communicate with her. One older woman converses regularly and angrily with her husband in the United States.<sup>354</sup>

The interactions that occurred online were new in that most of them would simply not have occurred in the absence of Internet – school friends would have said goodbye at the end of term and not communicated for the duration of the break<sup>355</sup> – yet, as similarly noted by Miller and Slater (2000:82) in their Trinidadian study, and contrary to earlier studies of the Internet that drew a sharp distinction between online and offline life, these interactions did not constitute a break with ordinary social life (cf. Slater 2002:533). Here, the online interactions took place within and as an extension of existing social relations (cf. Baym 2002:69; Buckingham 2002:79; Rice 2002:124; Miller and Slater 2000:82) and people brought to their online interactions 'such baggage as their gender, stage in the life cycle, cultural milieu, socioeconomic status, and offline connections with others' (Wellman 1997:446).

In these interactions, there was no virtuality, and no anonymity (cf. Miller and Slater 2000:82; Slater 2002:536-9; Baym 2002:68), so that Maria Luz turned a shade of crimson when a boy in an Internet café in La Paz made, via MSN Messenger<sup>356</sup>, snide commentaries on her character in response to accusations of love made by a group of giggling girls in a telecentre in Chulumani. On being informed by the giggling girls that the injured party was standing beside them at the time, reading his rashly chatted comments with feigned disinterest, the boy no doubt came to dread their next in-person meeting just as much as she did, for both he and she were very real (cf. Miller and Slater 2000:76). These interactions are no more virtual, in fact less so, than those that lead to the creation of an 'imagined Yungas community' (Anderson 1983) over the Radio Yungas soundwaves, or those that constitute some sort of truth for the avid, disbelief-suspending viewers of Mexican *telenovelas*.

The difference between this and the radio is that the communication is necessarily an outward one, one that draws the attention and the energy of participants up and out of the Yungas, toward a life outside the coca *field*, toward the city and beyond. In this sense, while no argument can be made for technological determinism, as users have adopted the medium in only some of infinitely possible ways, laying their sociality, their ways of interacting offline and even their mode of speech (Baym 2002:65) onto 'cyberspace' just as the coca growers lay theirs upon the radiowaves, the

---

<sup>354</sup> Baym (2002:63) discusses Bale's (1951) system of codifying messages, which he distinguishes between the socioemotional and the task-oriented. Lea (1991) points out that messages are usually multifunctional and can be both (cited in Baym 2002:63).

<sup>355</sup> Altheide made the same point in 1994, with reference to mobile phones and 'beepers'. He wrote that these new technologies made it much easier to 'stay in touch' across great distances, and that the 'teenage youth have added the "beeper" to their uniforms of the day as brightly coloured beepers illustrate the kind of person who is in demand' (Altheide 1994:673).

<sup>356</sup> Hotmail's instant messaging service.

nature of the medium nonetheless structures and restricts possibilities for communicative action in this fundamental, outward-looking, way (cf. Slater 2002:534).<sup>357</sup>

### **Integrating into a Wider Communicative Ecosystem on (Un)Certain Terms**

It would be a special change in knowledge. It's possible to get to know many things. We have to transmit to the population. I like to defend the *campesinos*. Some people came and they wanted to divide up a poor woman's land. I fought for her, and she won. They're the sons of the *hacienda* landlords. They're the same as the landlords. They go to the city to study, it goes badly for them, and they come back.

(Fermín, Coca grower and *dirigente*, Chulumani sector)

It's not good to give the kids too much liberty. They say there is everything about sexuality. Also about Pokemón.

(Adán, strawberry and coca grower and *dirigente*, Chulumani sector)

Above is an illustration of the utopic/dystopic polarisations inspired by the new and often little understood medium of the Internet (Buckingham 2002:77; Sassen 1999:50-1). On the one hand, Fermín imagines a functionality in the Internet that would restore the balance of unequal relations between local people and historical outsiders who seek control over both material and cultural production (land and knowledge), while on the other, Adán is concerned about the terms upon which his daughter will enter this new realm and her, or more precisely, *his* ability to effect control over the information that enters the Yungas from outside. Just like the radio and the television, as discussed in Chapter Four, the Internet is suspected of having the potential either to defend, or to undermine local people's ability to effect control over both material and cultural production.

In line with the 'visionary utopianism' (Buckingham 2002:77; cf. Sassen 1999:50-1) with which the Internet is approached by some of its proponents, *Alma* and *Vida's* telecentre proposal states that the Internet will provide populations presently 'marginalised and/or excluded from information' (Ribera 2003:48) with access to 'information related to the activities, anxieties, etc., of the *campesino* families', and thereby lead to an increase in abilities and knowledge, facilitating an impulse in microbusiness, greater insertion into the market and ultimately a better quality of life (Ribera 2003:93). Number 5.12 of thirty-one indicators outlined in the proposal to be achieved within a period of six months during the first phase of telecentre installation, reads:

---

<sup>357</sup> Baym (2002:65) discusses the language used in online interactions and cites Ferrara et al. (1991:10) who describe computer-mediated communication (CMC) as 'a hybrid language variety displaying characteristics of both oral and written language'. As an example, the email reproduced (in translation) in Chapter Four (page 152), is written largely as the writer would have spoken, and he was able to assume that we, the readers, had sufficient background knowledge (from reading his earlier emails), and a sufficient understanding of the casual language used, to be able to interpret the message.

In 6 populations, the digital divide has been successfully decreased through technology and digital inclusion, offering access to new and more diverse sources of knowledge and information, strengthening in that way the cosmovision, values, knowledges, organisation and technology of the *campesinos*, facilitating intercultural dialogue. (Ribera 2003:94)

However, the school students who visited the centre chose to access the vast global ecosystem in a very limited way, restricting their use largely to interactions via email and chat with individuals who formed a part of their existing offline social worlds. When school began, some students would come to the telecentre to download information for their homework: ‘Señora, how much does it cost for you to print me off an essay on Simón Bolívar?’ a small boy might ask. And when a girl tries to search for information on the history of Bolivian music, she soon learns that 7 bs is quickly spent as she fumbles with the idiosyncrasies of this new technology and wades through oceans of irrelevant material. When she finds something suitable, she will copy it out in her own handwriting and present it to the teacher who, unknowing, will applaud the sophisticated use of language and the thorough research (cf. Miller and Slater 2000:77).

The vision expressed in the project proposal, aside from being utopian, is also largely one based upon a ‘diffusion of innovations’ approach (cf. Díaz Bordenave 2006a; Rogers 1962; 1971; Waisbord n.d.:4; Gumucio-Dagron n.d.:8; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006:xvi-xviii; Lievrouw 2002), with those who are ‘excluded from information’ having it made available to them ‘through the Internet as a source of information’ (Ribera 2003:48). This approach involves innovations or information being transmitted from a source to a (we can assume largely passive) receiver (Waisbord n.d.:4), much like the sender-receiver or ‘hypodermic’ model (Lerner 1958; Schramm 1967; Morley 1992:45).<sup>358</sup>

Diffusion theory has been criticised for its implied technological determinism, as it treats technologies as stable and unchanging, focusing only on the effects of innovations on social systems at the expense of the dynamism and agency of the social systems or social actors themselves (Lievrouw 2002:187). Social shaping of technology theories, on the other hand, give primacy to human choices and action during interactions with technology (Lievrouw 2002:185). In the case at hand, while it could be loosely said that the girl in the example above was ingenious in adapting the medium in creative and strategic ways to achieve her aims, her actions were nonetheless restricted and determined in various ways (cf. Spitulnik 2002:351).<sup>359</sup> These had to do with both the nature of the technology she was using, as well as with the social context, or more

---

<sup>358</sup> Rogers’ (1962) ‘diffusion of innovations’ theory involves innovations being passed from a source (usually a ‘developed’ country) to a receiver (usually a ‘developing’ country or its inhabitants) (Waisbord n.d.:4). It can refer either directly to technologies and their adoption (Lievrouw 2002) or more broadly to the adoption of ideas and practices of any kind, such as the use of a condom or baby formula (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006:xvii-xviii). See Chapter Five (page 207) for a discussion of the ‘sender-receiver’ and ‘hypodermic’ models.

<sup>359</sup> Spitulnik (2002:351) writes, ‘more comparative research needs to be done to determine, on the one hand, the extent to which culture matters in the integration of media in daily life and, on the other hand, the extent to which media technologies have inherent properties that predispose them to certain kinds of uses and interpretations regardless of culture.’

precisely, the sub-ecosystem of communications of which she was a part, and her resultant positioning within the wider communicative ecosystem.

The Internet has been likened to Deleuze and Guattari's *rhizome* (Hamman 1996), an 'acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:21) 'in which communication runs from any neighbour to any other, the stems or channels do not pre-exist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their *state* at a given moment' (ibid.:17). While it may have been true in 1996, and still is to a certain extent, that the Internet is not hierarchical or centred in the sense that a computer with Internet connection can connect to any website anywhere in the world without mediation by a single central computer, it is not true that upon entering 'cyberspace' one steps onto a level playing field inscribed with equality and liberty, as Internet romancers would have it (Sassen 1999:50). This is because a player who enters 'cyberspace' enters as a real person, existing within a real social, political and economic sphere, within a real geographical locality, within a real country, within the real world. Sassen (ibid.:51) writes of the Internet, 'The utopian view excludes the fact that electronic space is embedded in actual societal structures and is internally segmented.'

It is inscribed by the structures and dynamics within which it is embedded... This means that power, contestation, inequality, in brief, hierarchy, inscribe electronic space... new hierarchies are being formed, borne out of the existing material conditions underlying power and the new conditions created by electronic space.

(ibid.:58)

When the students accessing the Internet in Chulumani's telecentre reach out to connect their sub-ecosystem to the global communicative ecosystem, they do so on certain terms. They are low down on a global technological hierarchy, because the Internet connection is not fast, the connection is often interrupted and it is not always possible to access certain sites or download specific programmes or information, leading us to consider Sassen's potential differentiation between a 'poor person's email' and a 'rich person's email' (ibid.:56, 62).<sup>360</sup> Their communication, as discussed above, is also necessarily outwardly directed due to the fact that there was, at that point in time, only one telecentre in Sud Yungas, which has obvious implications for the type of communication that could be achieved via this medium. Sassen (ibid.:60) refers to this as 'a spatialization of inequality which is evident both in the geography of the communications infrastructure and in the emergent geographies of electronic space itself'.<sup>361</sup>

---

<sup>360</sup> She writes that as powerful global players accrue greater access to state-of-the-art infrastructure and technologies, the distance will increase between the 'technological "haves" and "have nots" among firms and among consumers'. She continues, 'Finally, once inside cyberspace, users will also encounter an unequal geography of access. Those who can pay for it will have fast-speed servicing, and those who cannot will increasingly find themselves in very slow lanes' (Sassen 1999:62).

<sup>361</sup> See also Luke (1999:46), who writes, 'Software and networks do more than structure and present information; they also, more importantly, generate and sustain spaces, or hyperreal estates, which need to be rethought as spatial domains for human activity with their own unique properties of accessibility/inaccessibility, boundedness/unboundedness, underdevelopment/overdevelopment, security/insecurity, publicity/private, openness/enclosure or commodification/collectivization...' Luke (1999:46) uses the term 'cyberecology', referring to cyberspaces as environmental

More than this, the students enter 'cyberspace' from the standpoint of individuals who are low on a political, social and economic hierarchy more generally. With no local or locally mediated content, the information they access and process is necessarily of external origin and they access it passively, printing off material to hand in to the teacher unprocessed. Negotiating a poor education system, inexperienced teachers who are sent, often against their will, to complete their obligatory provincial posting and who are inadequately trained and almost certainly not trained in computing or Internet, these students do not have the skills nor the guidance to mediate this information in any meaningful or creative way. For some, like Adán above, this subordination in terms of cultural production signalled a threat. Reynaldo says, 'They say you can even have sexual relations via Internet':

The little girls often use it to look for boyfriends. It could be dangerous – things can happen through fault of the Internet, can't they? The girls are innocent and they're chatting with older people. There need to be courses so that they can learn to use it for something more productive.<sup>362</sup>

Guillermo, who comes from a predominantly Afro-Bolivian town, says:

They told me you can download any kind of signal. We have to look at how it can influence the youth. Many people don't use it with good intentions. They can send messages, for example making a campaign against someone or against another nation. It could be harmful. Some people will download or send important notes. Others will do destructive things.

The students also lacked the skills to contribute their own knowledges to the Internet and to assert their own presence in the global ecosystem, as stated grandly in the proposal, to strengthen their 'cosmivision, values, knowledges', and to engage in 'intercultural dialogue' (Ribera 2003:94). Their interactions within the wider communicative ecosystem place them in a subordinate relation to sources from outside the coca *field*. Where Castells (2004:3) writes that today's 'network society', which has to do with the way in which humans are organised differentially in relations of production, consumption and power expressed as such through 'meaningful *communication* coded by culture', these students constitute a little relevant, and only marginally included *node* in this network (Castells 1996:470, 2004:3).<sup>363</sup>

---

sites, 'points of contestation where informational discourses seek to generate the identities or discipline behaviours of digital beings...'

<sup>362</sup> See Miller and Slater (2000:61-72) and Slater (2002:534) on 'cybersex'.

<sup>363</sup> Castells (2004:3) writes that the world today is made up of different networks powered by *microelectronics-based information and communication technologies*. These networks are in turn made up of interconnected *nodes*, a *node* being the point at which the curve intersects itself. These nodes are of varying relevance for their network, being able to increase their importance to the network by absorbing and efficiently processing more relevant *information*. When a node becomes redundant or of no use to the network's performance, the network reconfigures itself, deleting the redundant node (1996:470, 2004:3).



So perhaps the analogy of a rhizome is not so appropriate here, since the 'stems or channels' of communication *do* pre-exist, with users adopting the medium to maintain contact, along already trodden lines, with friends and family, and all individuals are not 'interchangeable', nor are they 'defined *only* by their state at a given moment' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:17). Rather, they are defined, always, by the geographical, social, political, economic and historical node/point/moment at which they enter 'cyberspace' and are subjected to the hierarchies that exist outside the net, and which in turn dictate the hierarchies that exist on the net. As Hamman (1996:4) acknowledges, the simile becomes problematic when considering differential access determined by class, ethnicity and gender. Here, the students' positioning within the ecosystem of coca communications, as well as the positioning of that sub-system within the global communicative ecosystem, dictates the terms upon which they are able to be integrated into that wider, 'cyber' and real, ecosystem.

*Alma* and *Vida's* diffusion of innovations approach, technologically determinant in that the technologies themselves were left alone to achieve positive social and economic change, did not account for the existing communicative ecosystem, or the 'pre-existing cultural and social environment onto which these technological initiatives are mapped' (Nair et al. 2006:4). More attention might have been paid to initial needs assessments, to elicit the kinds of communications that individuals really wanted and needed to engage in, and to consider ways of facilitating the effective execution of that communication. In particular, more effort might have been applied to training and to working towards the creation of local contents (Balaji et al. n.d.:8; Gumucio-Dagron 2004a:6; Haseloff 2005:4; Oestman and Dymond 2001:6), so that Fermín might have the opportunity to work toward redressing historical power imbalances, and Adán's fears might be allayed. As it happened, neither of these men visited the telecentre, for reasons that will be discussed in the following section.

## **Producing Coca or Cyber-Culture?: Who owns the Telecentre?**

### **Inclusions: Who Inhabits the Telecentre?**

The first day I met Benjamin, my new next-door neighbour, he asked if I would teach his daughter, Warita, to use the Internet. Warita was eight and wanted to be a lawyer, as well as a Pastor like her father. Her parents, neither of whom had the opportunity to study beyond primary school, wanted her to become a 'professional', and planned to send her and her little brothers to live in El Alto to finish their schooling. 'We're going to live in La Paz in two years' time', said Warita's seven-year-old brother, Jacob. 'We'll be big by then, won't we?' While I was supervising the telecentre, Warita would sit with me and learn to use the computer and the Internet. 'I want to write to that young man', she said on one occasion. 'That young man, you know, in Chile. I want to write and tell him to give us back our sea.' Sadly, her mother had arrived to take her home before she had managed to

labouriously type and send her request to Presidente Lagos for devolution of Bolivia's coastline, purloined in 1884.

Other times, she would write a pre-love letter to her friend Tito (who lived next-door), or steal a few minutes of net-game time before succumbing to the intimidation of the rambunctious boys whose domain this was (cf. Buckingham 2002:79). After Carola's *pensión* failed and the family moved to a nearby community to try their luck with coca, Warita could no longer continue coming to use the Internet. Those she left behind in the telecentre were mostly school students from the town, or those young people from the communities who had been sent to study in the town during term time, as well as professionals on placement from the city and the odd stray tourist. Many of the students who participated in *Alma's* first Internet course in December 2003 left for La Paz to resume their studies at the beginning of the next year, where they had access to Internet and computer training at their secondary institutions (cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:22; 2004a:6; IICD 2005:58-59; Rice 2002).<sup>364</sup>

Maria Luz is one of these students, a lively, restless teenager enjoying one last holiday in town before being packaged off to an aunt to begin High School. There are several reasons why she is able to and wants to make this space her home during the long, lazy months of the rainy season. To begin with, the fact that she is physically located in the town where the telecentre is situated means that she need only walk a few minutes before arriving there. Her mother, currently concerned about drugs, knows exactly where to find, and if necessary, scold her (cf. IICD 2005:59).<sup>365</sup> A second reason is that when she is not selling chickens for her mother, early and loudly outside my window as she banter competitively with the other chicken seller across the street, she has little better to do with her time than to experiment with the new technology and sociality that the telecentre provides (ibid.).

She also has the good fortune that her parents have the money to pay and are inclined to spend the relatively high hourly cost of 7 bs (just under US\$1) for her to use the Internet. Net games are more affordable at 3 bs an hour, but more attractive to ten-year-old Beto than to Maria Luz (cf. Buckingham 2002:78-9). While most people find this to be expensive, there are nonetheless a good number of families who are able to make this sacrifice on a daily basis, seeing it as a worthy investment in the skills that their son or daughter will need in the future (cf. Buckingham 2002:77; Kellner 2002) and content in the knowledge that their children are 'on the Internet' instead of on the streets.

---

<sup>364</sup> Gumucio-Dagron (2001a:22; 2004a:6) writes that many telecentres are only used by upper middle class students, teachers and tourists. The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) (2005:58-59), a Dutch non-profit foundation working in Bolivia, has written of telecentres in a detailed report on their programme in Bolivia: 'The fact that the centres are sometimes monopolised by students and others has meant that farmers, indigenous leaders, and certainly women are unable or unwilling to frequent the information centres. If all the computers are occupied by web-surfing young men, members of the actual target group of the project are reluctant to go inside.'

<sup>365</sup> IICD (2005:59) note that the location of the centre will have an impact on who uses it and who takes ownership, suggesting that a centre for agricultural information should be owned and administrated by a farmers' association and that if students are the target group, the centre should be located on the school grounds.

Maria Luz is also literate, a prerequisite for computer and Internet use, and is young and confident in her ability to acquire the new skills that computer literacy asks of her (cf. Kellner 2002). She finds that the Internet and the telecentre hold relevance for her life in two ways. Firstly, like her parents, she recognises the value of the cultural capital she will gain from acquiring these skills, capital that will be most useful to her in a future they all imagine for her, outside the coca *field*. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly for her right now, the acts of communication in which she takes part over the Internet as well as interpersonally within the telecentre, are acts of social capital accumulation and protection. For a fifteen-year-old, shorter and younger-looking than her make-up and mini-skirt wearing friends and balancing in those liminal spaces between childhood and adulthood, country and city, it becomes particularly important to work on the maintenance and strengthening of peer-group relationships. This work is increasingly occurring for young people over the Internet, as well as in the youth hub that the space of the telecentre has become (cf. Baym 2002; Benjamin 2001:77; Miller and Slater 2000:72-75; Slater 2002; Slater and Tacchi 2004:65).

Finally, Maria Luz and her friends are able to feel that the telecentre is *their* space, since from the beginning, the place has been frequented almost exclusively by people like them. Even the staff are like them: a young man recommended by the Town Hall (his father was once Mayor), and his sister.<sup>366</sup> They are from a distinguished family of Chulumani *vecinos*, middle-upper class and *blanco*, which served to reinforce the impression that this is the domain of a non-coca growing elite. After the sudden closure of the telecentre, the relentless demands of small boys and other townsfolk made me aware of the extent to which they felt that this institution was rightfully and justly theirs. 'When will the telecentre be open, Señorita!' they would cry. Lida, who owns a store near the telecentre, demanded:

When is there going to be Internet?! People come and ask me and I don't know where to send them! They really want it and there's nowhere to send them! Pressure them!! Tell them we need it! Everyone's asking!

So it can be deduced that Maria Luz and her sometimes friends fit six important criteria for telecentre use:

- 1) geographical positioning
- 2) disposable time
- 3) economic capital
- 4) literacy and the ability and confidence to acquire new skills (cultural capital)
- 5) a conception of the telecentre and Internet as being relevant to their lives
- 6) the ability to develop a sense of ownership over the telecentre and the use of this new medium.

---

<sup>366</sup> A young Afro-Bolivian woman from a community, who had studied in the city, was initially employed in the centre after having become acquainted with *Alma's* Director in the town disco. However, she was dismissed after showing little enthusiasm for the job.

These criteria translate to their position and the types of capital that they possess within the coca *field*. To begin with, by virtue of the fact that they are residing in the town, they are necessarily, if only temporarily in the case of students from the communities, non-producers.<sup>367</sup> Secondly, they must come from a family that has the economic capital to pay for them to use the Internet, as well as to allow them to undertake such pursuits at the expense of time spent contributing labour to the family business. The family must also have the economic capital to have invested in an education that will have provided the child with the level of literacy required to use the Internet. Students who travel from their communities to study in the town during the school term must necessarily come from families whose possession of land, disposable labour, exchange relations and so on, facilitate the accumulation of an economic surplus with which they are able to cover the costs of renting a room for their child and paying for them to eat meals in a *pensión* if they are deemed unable to cook for themselves. This is without mentioning the comparatively trivial cost of using the Internet. They must also forego the labour of a strong and able-bodied worker during the time the student is away.

With reference to the final two points, use of the Internet becomes most relevant for those students whose families have the economic capital to send them to study in La Paz, and who therefore have friends and relatives outside of the Yungas with whom non-urgent communication becomes urgent. And finally, it was non-producers who were encouraged to foster a sense of ownership over the telecentre, through participation in courses and consultations, as will be discussed shortly.

Paying reference to Gumucio-Dagron's (2003, 2004a) five essential elements for a successful ICT project, the characteristics of this telecentre corresponded most neatly to the needs of non-producing school students from families well positioned within the coca *field*.<sup>368</sup> Or, more precisely, this group's habitus, together with the capital with which they were endowed, particularly economic and cultural, was most suited to their adapting their social and communicative practices to the new environment that the telecentre and the Internet facilitated (Bourdieu 1977:78). They understood the language used on the Internet (Spanish) and could adapt to at the same time as creating, online cultures and modes of communication (cf. Slater 2002:537).<sup>369</sup> They could access and learn to use the new technologies, they generated their own content in the form of online conversations, ignoring the rest (cf. Balaji et al. n.d.:8; Haseloff 2005:4; Oestman and Dymond 2001:6), and they were able to assume symbolic ownership over the telecentre (Gumucio-Dagron 2003; 2004a) in ways that other groups were not.

---

<sup>367</sup> There are, as discussed, people who live in the town and travel to the *campo* on a daily basis to harvest others' coca fields. These people, however, did not visit the telecentre due to time constraints as well as reasons of finances, skills, relevance and ownership, as discussed above.

<sup>368</sup> Gumucio-Dagron's five essential elements are 1) community ownership of the project, 2) generation of local and socioculturally relevant content, requiring the training of local staff, 3) use of appropriate technologies, 4) locally appropriate convergence of old and new technologies, and 5) use of local languages and cultures (Gumucio-Dagron 2003; 2004a). See page 228 above.

<sup>369</sup> Slater (2002:537) is concerned to point out that so-called 'cyberculture' is never a unified online culture, but 'a highly diverse amalgam of cultural conjunctures...' He writes that 'cyberculture' was not a spontaneous and intrinsic product of the characteristics of new media, but arose out of the possibilities recognised in this new medium, by offline cultures.

## Exclusions: Perpetuating Thought Categories

'Sí mi amor, sí mi amor, no mi amor', says Regina on the telephone to Maria Luz, who does not like her aunt. When she hangs up, Doña Elena, the owner of the telephone enterprise, spends a few seconds pretending not to notice, before pressing the button on the stop-watch, and charging her accordingly. Regina can see the merit in using the Internet to communicate with her children, all three of whom are studying in different cities, but she does not have the skills, nor the time to learn.

When they had courses here in the telecentre, I couldn't go because of the timetable. I was working. From one or two, from two to three o'clock, I could go. Normally after three I'm in the orchard. I'm only here today because they're harvesting honey and because I have more chickens to sell. It's very necessary to learn. It's more convenient, more economical. And we're not going to go and pay money if we don't know how to use it.

While it was the nature of the medium that required her to learn a new set of skills in order to use it (cf. Kellner 2002), it was partly an inattentiveness on the part of the NGOs, to the labour system and daily schedules of the different sectors, that meant that she and others could not attend the courses held.<sup>370</sup> IICD (2005:59) suggest providing basic ICT literacy training at specific timeslots for specific groups, and also ensuring that opening times are geared to labour routines. But this is a small part of the reason why certain groups were not to be found in the telecentre. These hark back to historical and current positionings within the coca *field*, and have to do with economic capital, cultural capital and habitus.

Except for the very poorest families, economic capital is not so much an issue in terms of handing over the coins for daily use, whether for townfolk or *campesinos*. Lizet told me confidently that she would be able to pay 50 bs (US\$6.25) per month to learn computing and Internet, which, considering that her monthly income at that time was 400 bs (US\$50), was no small amount to forgo, and demonstrates the returns that people expect from learning to use this medium (cf. *ibid.*:60). Rather, what is important is economic capital in a broader sense, going back to issues of land ownership, labour, organisation and exchange, and coupled with habitus.

After her family moved away, Warita said she would visit the telecentre on weekends, but even when it was her turn to make the much-prized shopping journey to town with her mother, the moment always came too soon when the truck would sound its horn, calling impatiently to the dispersed community members and leaving time only for noodles and potatoes, not for Internet. Lizet and her mother, Dolores, live in a nearby community, but they too have to hurry back after shopping on a Sunday, and spend the other days in the fields. During the week, they are too tired after the long workday to travel to Chulumani, even if there is transport available and when I ask

---

<sup>370</sup> In fact, the NGO had scheduled the courses at 5 p.m., thinking that the working day would be over.

Lizet's mother if she would like to learn to use the Internet, she says 'I would like to, but I have my work'. She and Regina are both too busy for such things.

In any case, Lizet's mother is at a disadvantage, for like many of the women of her generation, she is illiterate (cf. Kellner 2002; Ruíz 1994). Those who do not speak *castellano* are also excluded, as there is very little content in Aymara on the Internet (cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2004a:9), although the few remaining elderly people in the area who fall into this category are unlikely to be literate, and are therefore excluded on two counts.<sup>371</sup> These people, from both *campo* and *pueblo*, lack the fundamental skills to be able to use the Internet, due to the fact that economic and cultural capital were not expended in their upbringing (Bourdieu 1986:244). This was due to the position of their family within the coca *field*; their land ownership, disposable labour and exchange practices dictating the surplus that they were able to spend on the transmission of cultural capital, and the labour that they were able to forego upon sending a child to school. In the case of women particularly, the habitus often dictated ideas about gender and the gendered division of labour, that would lead to a decision not to send a female child to school (Bourdieu 1977:87; cf. Ruíz 1994:165).

While most people in the Yungas today have a certain degree of literacy, many are unaccustomed to reading and writing, as illustrated to me by a young woman who, despite having completed secondary school, was challenged by the gruelling experience of filling in a bank account application form, as requested by NGO *Vida* for a project (cf. Gigler 2001:36).<sup>372</sup> 'I was trembling!' she says. 'We only harvest – we're not used to writing!' Her friend agrees, and demonstrating how he harvests coca, says, 'My hands no longer know how to do anything else'. Pamela, who supplements the income gained through her all-purpose store in Chulumani with the harvest from her coca field, says of the Internet, 'My children might be interested to learn. I no longer have the capacity to learn. Only to weave, cook, harvest.'

Pamela and Dolores both imagine a certain usefulness for the Internet, which has to do with maintaining already existing social networks (Baym 2002; Miller and Slater 2000; Slater 2002). 'Maybe my children will go overseas. That way I could contact them,' says Pamela. But right now, her children are not overseas; they are in La Paz, and she uses the telephone to speak to them, because she knows how. Dolores uses the radio to send an urgent message if need be, or travels to speak with someone face to face. Neither of these women can see any particular benefit in travelling to use a machine that they must first learn to use, in order to do something that they are already achieving by other means. Pamela says:

---

<sup>371</sup> Most Aymara speakers, even those who are literate and speak *castellano*, say that they do not know how to read or write Aymara, as all schooling was undertaken in *castellano*.

<sup>372</sup> Gigler (2001:36) writes that low literacy levels in indigenous populations around the world pose a major challenge to increasing ICT use in these communities.



Radio is more practical and easy. You don't have to take classes. You can take it everywhere. In the *campo*, everyone takes the radio and listens while they work. You can't do that with a computer!

There are, however, both producers and non-producers who can find relevance in the Internet, as already discussed. One *dirigente* from a large community says he uses the Internet with the help of his children when he travels to La Paz. 'I have friends in the whole world', he says. 'I want to open my (web) page, to be able to communicate with everyone'. The Director of a community school, meanwhile, scans the news on the web when he travels to visit family in La Paz. These people have a certain level of capital within the *field*. They have economic capital, and they have the cultural capital, by way of skills, that Dolores lacks. People who are in a position to travel regularly for trade, or to hold an important role in the *sindicato* or local government and must travel for meetings or other business, find their communicational opportunities broadening as they shift their geographical positioning within the communicative ecosystem.

However, even these people bypassed the telecentre in Chulumani on their way to La Paz. One reason for this may be that they, unlike the town school children, felt no sense of ownership over this particular centre, and this has as much to do with the way in which the project was implemented as it does with the nature of the medium itself. As will be discussed in the following chapter, there was little consultation and little participation sought from the community at any stage of the project. The meeting that was held in September 2004 by *Vida* to 'gauge the opinion of Chulumani' over the proposed reopening of the telecentre took place in the Town Hall with eight invited stakeholders from the local council, the local business sector, the radio and an NGO.<sup>373</sup> There were no representatives of the 'indigenous groups, women's groups, *campesinos*, youths and other marginalised and exploited sectors' that the NGOs claimed the telecentre was designed to benefit (Ribera 2003:35; cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2004a:4).<sup>374</sup> And while *Alma's* proposal paid homage to the rural actors with whom it is in vogue to work (Ribera 2003:35), the Internet courses that were held in December 2003 took place during the day, on weekdays, when no agriculturalist was able to attend (cf. IICD 2005:59).

Gumucio-Dagron (2004a:4) has written that the main reason for failed telecentre projects is a lack of 'community awareness and social appropriation of the project', where 'communities do not have the sense of ownership of the project and do not feel that the installations are essential to their social and economic development' (cf. CRIS Bolivia 2003:39; IICD 2005:58-59; Nair et al. 2006:53; Slater and Tacchi 2004:75). Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte write:

---

<sup>373</sup> Those in attendance were the Mayor, two councillors, a staff member of an NGO working in the area, the Manager of the Coop Society (originally from La Paz), a staff member of Radio Yungas, the owner of an important transport company, and the influential *ex-hacendado* of a nearby community. The reason for inviting these particular individuals to be a part of the project was that it was hoped that their organisations would agree to contribute to the cost of the Internet connection, which would serve several outlets (cf. IICD 2005:60).

<sup>374</sup> Gumucio-Dagron (2004a:4) writes, 'We can not claim social change without community participation, and this should take place from the first discussions about the potential of providing ICT support to a particular region. It is certainly not enough to discuss with government authorities or even with local authorities'.

The concept goes beyond the ownership of media and technology; it is not simply a matter of owning the tools, e.g., a radio station, a newspaper or a television channel, but also a question of gaining a piece of, or appropriating, the communication process, including content design, management and decision-making.

(2006:xix)

When Rafael, a young coca grower, said, 'We don't know about Internet. We tend to dedicate ourselves more to coca', he was expressing the idea that there is a necessary opposition between someone who knows about Internet and someone who knows about coca. His habitus, the durably installed system of structured and structuring dispositions, excluded Internet use as a possibility for 'the likes of him' (Bourdieu 1977:77-78). As cited by Bourdieu (1977:77), Hume writes, 'We are no sooner acquainted with the impossibility of satisfying any desire, than the desire itself vanishes'.<sup>375</sup>

Gómez and Martínez (2001:1) have written that ICTs are neither positive nor negative in themselves, but neither are they neutral and if left alone, they may in fact end up reproducing and deepening existing inequalities in society (cf. Gigler 2001:37; Martin-Barbero 2006:919; Rice 2002:106; Skuse and Cousins 2007:188).<sup>376</sup> Without solid attempts to foster a sense of ownership of the telecentre within the *campesino* sector, or to consider who was suited to the telecentre with reference to the six prerequisites for access outlined above, the conditions and environment of the telecentre remained unsuited to Rafael and Pamela, and the divisions constituted within the coca production system both guide and are reinforced by communicative practices. As Bourdieu writes:

...practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that to which they are objectively fitted.

(1977:78)

Such was the experience of the old man described at the beginning of this chapter. In this way, the 'digital divide', considered on a macro-level to run between rich and poor countries, and within these, between urban and rural areas, rich and poor neighbourhoods (Sassen 1999:58) opens up now along fault lines within the coca *field*, crackling through the ecosystem of coca communications, fault lines that are the thought lines of labour, class and ethnicity.

### **Climbing Thought Ladders out of the Ecosystem: Virtual Escapes from Imagined Selves**

As I sat outside the school in Chulumani, a woman came by, wearing a *pollera*, and with a colourful *aguayo* cloth on her back, carrying lunch or perhaps a baby. She had walked from her community,

---

<sup>375</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1874). Likewise, Bourdieu cites Marx in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*: 'If I have no money for travel, I have no need, i.e. no real and self-realizing need, to travel. If I have a vocation to study, but no money for it, I have no vocation to study, i.e. no real, true vocation' (Bourdieu 1977:77; see Marx 1959).

<sup>376</sup> See also CRIS Bolivia (2003:39), Gumucio-Dagron (2003:4; 2004a:3-5) Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte (2006:xx) and Slater and Tacchi (2004:75) on the importance of community ownership of ICT projects.

an hour away, to register her son for his first year of high school. She had wanted to send him to La Paz, as 'they say they don't teach well here – but where would he stay, who would look after him, cook for him? And what's more, he's a boy'. She sat beside me and asked whether I gave private computing classes. 'For you?' I asked. 'No!' she replied, shocked and amused. 'As if I would learn! Just for the kids – that's better, isn't it?'

Learning to use computers and the Internet is considered essential for children from *campo* and *pueblo* in order for them to have the opportunity to compete with other students in gaining tertiary places and employment in the city (cf. Buckingham 2002:77). Magdalena from the bank, says, 'The kids in the town get left behind. The kids in the city already know'. The understanding is that these skills will allow them to exit the agricultural cycle and avoid following down the coca lined path of their parents, bent in the hot harvest sun or stagnating in the town. Lida expresses this concern, when explaining why children need to learn to use the Internet:

What happens is that the kids from the *campo* get their high school certificate, and then they stay in the *campo* because they don't find any work. They become agronomists without meaning to.

In other words, people's expectations of the Internet do not include bettering the conditions of those who remain in rural areas. The select group who are able to access the telecentre use it to work to accrue further capital - social, cultural, symbolic, and ultimately further economic capital, through city-based employment - for themselves and their family. Importantly, they can only do this as non-producers, and, furthermore, the capital that they hope will be useful for them in their imagined futures (Appadurai 1996) is capital that can be translated to another *field*, beyond the coca *field*. Cultural capital in the form of computing and Internet skills is recognised as capital within the coca *field*, but only inasmuch as it is understood that it can be cashed in, in some wider, better field, and made to work for someone as they climb labour, social, economic and ethnic ladders. Aurelia, a coca-grower and mother of twelve, says:

I'm going to die soon. The solution is in the children – with their studies, something will come up, they'll figure something out. They'll eat something a bit better. They'll go to the city.

Rather than the 'digital divide' being *closed*, perhaps this divide, that is social, political, economic and historic as much as it is technological (Gumucio-Dagron 2003:1), will continue instead to be *crossed* by people as they strive to leave behind that which is thought harder, lesser, more antiquated, than whatever it is that waits on the other side.

## Conclusion: Striving for a More Ecologically-Friendly Project

Did Chulumani's telecentre project contribute to the narrowing of the 'digital divide', as the practitioners hoped it would (Ribera 2003:4)? Was the project compatible with the social justice ideals of the communications specialists at the pre-WSIS Seminar in La Paz in 2003? It was a combination of the nature of the technology being dealt with, the way in which it was inserted into a new environment, and the nature of that environment itself (cf. Spitulnik 2002:351) that resulted in, on the one hand, the 'digital divide' between town and country being narrowed for Chulumani school students, and on the other, the social, economic and political divides that necessitated the exclusion of the rest of the population remaining or perhaps, in some small way, being deepened (Gigler 2001:37; Rice 2002:106; Skuse and Cousins 2007:188). The new technology was inserted into a pre-existing, although constantly changing and shifting ecosystem, with divisions, hierarchies and inequalities; a system which is itself a sub-system of a larger ecosystem with its own divisions, hierarchies and inequalities (Castells 1996; 2004; Sassen 1999). Necessarily, the use to which the technology was put, as well as the dynamics in terms of who used it, was governed by these systems.

The people who were able to and who chose to make use of the telecentre were those who were positioned within the coca *field* and the ecosystem of coca communications as non-producers, either by virtue of being town school students from non-producing families, or students from the *campo* who studied in town and were therefore removed from productive activities for the duration of the school term. They were also positioned within the coca *field* such that their or their family's relations in terms of land, labour, exchange and so on translated to a prerequisite amount of capital. Principally, they had the economic capital to spend in the telecentre as well as, more importantly, the money to reside in the town for the duration of the term or the holidays without contributing labour to the family business. Secondly, sufficient cultural and economic capital (gained variously through the conversion of social, symbolic and cultural capital) had been expended in their upbringing (Bourdieu 1986:244), to provide them with the functional literacy to use the Internet.

Their position within the coca field, their accumulated capital and their habitus combined to situate them in the best position of any group to take advantage of the Internet telecentre, as assessed according to six essential criteria for telecentre use. They were correctly positioned geographically, they had disposable time, they had economic capital, they were literate and had the capacity and the confidence to learn new skills, and finally, their system of dispositions or habitus (Bourdieu 1977), together with the NGOs' mode of implementation, allowed them to find relevance in the Internet as a medium and the telecentre as a social space, and to develop a sense of ownership over both.

The students who did access the telecentre used it predominantly to maintain and strengthen existing social relationships and social networks, using email and chat in conjunction with other communicative avenues such as telephone and travel to communicate with friends and family (Baym 2002:64; Miller and Slater 2000; Rice 2002:118-9; cf. du Toit et al. 2007; Nair et al. 2006:4; Skuse and Cousins 2007). Because there was only one telecentre in Sud Yungas, this communication was necessarily directed outward to somewhere other than the Yungas. The students worked on their social capital accumulation both online and offline, the telecentre itself becoming a social hub where relationships and peer-groups were formed and strengthened (Benjamin 2001:77; Miller and Slater 2000:55-83; Slater 2002; Slater and Tacchi 2004:65). The cultural capital they gained as they learnt new technical skills was converted into symbolic and social capital and, it was hoped, would later be converted back into economic capital for individual and family as the student left the Yungas for a promising future in the city. In this way, the Internet and the telecentre represented for most people, not a better Yungas, but a pathway up and away: out of the Yungas, and up the ladders of labour, class and ethnicity. What the students were working to accumulate was capital that would be recognised and convertible beyond the coca *field*. By having left behind productive activities to use the telecentre, they were already on their way.

When the students did reach out to connect to a wider, global communicative ecosystem, they did so on highly unequal terms, subordinated to external sources by virtue of the place they started from. As a sub-system or network, the ecosystem of coca communications is low on the technological, pedagogic, social, political, economic and historical hierarchy, a situation that translates in cyberspace into inferior technological infrastructure on the one hand (Sassen 1999:56), and a disadvantage within the relations of cultural production on the other, with students ill equipped to mediate information on equal terms to those who disseminated the information, and without the capacity to create and disseminate their own material on the Internet.

For this situation to have been different, NGOs *Alma* and *Vida* might have conducted initial needs assessments that paid more attention to the existing communicative ecosystem (Nair et al. 2006:4); to the ruptures and divisions of labour and land, to the lines of exchange and association that structure communicative practices within the Yungas. Rather than relying on a hands-off 'diffusion of innovations' approach (Gumucio-Dagron n.d.:8; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006:xvi-xviii; Lievrouw 2002; Rogers 1962; 1971; Waisbord n.d.:4), they might have redirected their goals to consider the ways in which this new medium would most usefully have become a part of this system: what communication needs and desires people had, and how those could be realised. It may have been asked how the telecentre could become a welcome and accessible place for Don Fermín, while being understood that Pamela is frankly not interested, and satisfies her communication needs perfectly well by drawing on the media already available to her within the communicative ecosystem.

In line with Gumucio-Dagron's (2003, 2004a) recommendations, more attention might have been paid to user and staff training, and to the production of local content, to place users on an even footing with those others who inhabit the world wide web (Balaji et al. n.d.:8; Gumucio-Dagron 2004a:6; Haseloff 2005:4; Oestman and Dymond 2001:6). Importantly, Yungas people from all different sectors needed to be involved in the process of project implementation from the very beginning, in order to create community ownership and ensure that the project was to respond to community needs (Gómez and Martínez 2001:20; Gumucio-Dagron 2004a:3). And finally, an assessment of the ecosystem of coca communications would have alerted project ideologues to the possibilities of creative convergence between the two media of Internet and radio (CRIS Bolivia 2003:39; Girard 2001; Gumucio-Dagron 2003:5-6; 2004a:11).

There are many successful examples of local radio stations using Internet to enhance their programmes and to provide their listeners with a more comprehensive information service (CRIS Bolivia 2003; Girard 2000; 2001; n.d.; Gómez and Martínez 2001; Sitoni and Gorgen 2005; Tacchi et al. 2003a; Tacchi et al. 2003b; Wilson et al. 2005).<sup>377</sup> Kothmale Community Radio in Sri Lanka is one good example of a radio station that has adopted the Internet as part of its daily broadcasting and programming. During 'radio browsing' programmes, listeners can call in to the station requesting information, which the presenters search for on the Internet and then broadcast in the local language (Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:127-132; Hughes 2003).<sup>378</sup> Girard (2001:3) writes that 'distribution systems for... knowledge are most effective when building on the local information systems currently in use,' and points to the importance of radio in providing an alternative mechanism via which information available over the Internet might be made accessible for those who are unable or unwilling to directly access its infrastructure (Girard 2001:3; cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2004a:10). Gómez and Martínez similarly write:

It is more beneficial to use ICTs to enhance existing practices than to promote new activities for the primary purpose of using ICTs. In this light, the creation of telecentres that are disconnected from existing community organisations and initiatives is unlikely to contribute to development.

(2001:8)

---

<sup>377</sup> There are also many examples of ICT initiatives that have converged with and built on already existing initiatives, or used new technologies to complement the use of older ones (cf. Girard 2001; Nair et al. 2006; Slater and Tacchi 2004). Púlsar is one interesting example, as an information agency that draws on the Internet to prepare special news editions each day. These are sent out via an email list to community radio stations around Latin America, ready for broadcast. See Gumucio-Dagron (2001a:167-170) and the Association for Progressive Communications (2000). Soul City is an example of a multimedia initiative that combines the use of a television series with radio programmes and print material as it works towards positive change in health behaviour. See Tufte (2001b; 2006a).

<sup>378</sup> Girard (2001:9; n.d.:8) cites the example of Radio Yungas, describing a programme in which radio staff employed the Internet, presumably during a short-lived period of connectivity, to search for and then broadcast answers to listeners' questions. Apparently the Internet enabled staff to access information from a leading Swedish worm expert who identified an unknown worm causing concern to at least one of the listeners. However, several years later when I spent time in the Yungas, none of the staff at the station remembered this programme, and none of the listeners I spoke to remembered hearing it. And people still complain of worms. While the telecentre was in operation, radio staff did visit the telecentre to collect news items to be broadcast over the radio and continued to do so via Irupana's telecentre after it was opened.



As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, the radio is an integral part of the communicative ecosystem of the Yungas, and one that has a long history of working to ensure that it is a useful tool for the realisation of local people's communication needs. By connecting the two media of radio and Internet, a meaningful cross-over may have occurred between telecentre as the domain of the middle-class, non-producing townsfolk on the one hand, and on the other, the Radio Yungas family, *campesino* by definition. This might have connected people in new and interesting ways to a world of information, at the same time as facilitating new possibilities for cultural production, as information accessed via Internet would be mediated by radio listeners and then fed back into the ecosystem via radio or via word of mouth. Perhaps it could even work to address those felt historical inequalities between Yungueños and outsiders, as imagined by Fermín.

Instead, the telecentre project reinforced and reproduced patterns of rupture, of exclusion and inclusion along thought lines of labour, class and ethnicity, as position within the coca production system, combined with capital and habitus, dictated possibilities for cultural production by means of the Internet, and was in turn reinforced and reproduced by this in a cyclical fashion. Historical patterns of unequal power relations were also seen to be reproduced between Yungueños and outsiders, with the NGOs representing those historical outsiders. It became apparent how little consultation had gone on with local people after the telecentre closed unexpectedly, with no explanation from the NGOs. Shocked upon learning that the telecentre had been put in place by an NGO, one woman said, 'If people find out it's an NGO, they can throw them out of here in a moment!' When NGO *Alma* had pulled their Internet line from the school to service the telecentre in 2003, they claimed that this would mean greater access for more people. Yet by now the telecentre had been closed for three weeks and *no one* had access, and no one knew why. 'How does the town allow this to happen?!' asked the woman, indignant. The man who was with her simply replied, 'The town doesn't know.'

**7 DEVELOPING THE ECOSYSTEM OF COCA COMMUNICATIONS: DEVELOPMENT 'ORGANISMS' AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADAPTATION**



**FIGURE 30: Coca leaves drying in a Yungas community.**  
(Photo by author, June 2005).

Ecology implies balance. Acoustic ecology implies balance between sound and silence, between listening and soundmaking.

(Westerkamp 1994:93)

They talk about poverty, but I say, poverty of what? The economic, you can obtain that. The cultural, you can't.

(Irupana section resident at Aymara New Year celebration)

## Introduction

In the conference room of Chulumani's Town Hall, sitting around a large, magisterial table on a raised platform, are all of the most prominent characters in the latest chapter of Sud Yungas' local political history. The new Mayor is there: the first indigenous, coca-growing Mayor ever to have sat around this important table. The ex-Executive of the Coca Growers' *Federación* is there too, not a little bitter that his grassroots neglected to elect him as Mayoral candidate for ADEPCOCA<sup>379</sup>, registered as a 'citizens organisation' in the first year that such organisations were allowed to run for local council.<sup>380</sup> Several others from the *Federación* are there too. Together, they mitigate their losses by making decisions for the Mayor, whose naivety and inexperience are both a liability and a blessing for different people at different times. Elected members from the more traditionally-oriented parties highlight these qualities wherever possible.

Seated in chairs below the raised platform are fifteen expectant members of a small community. They have banished their differences for the day and come together here to discuss with the council, and the representative of the Dutch NGO (also seated at the raised and important table), the funding of four new classrooms for their school. The problem is that the different parties (the community, the NGO and the council) cannot come to an agreement, and the reasons they cannot come to an agreement are economic, political, social and historical.

The Municipality's Annual Operating Programme (POA)<sup>381</sup> for this year, in which 18 000 bolivianos (US\$2250) was pledged for the construction of the rooms, was drawn up by the outgoing Mayor, a member of the MNR<sup>382</sup>, the political party responsible for the recent massacre in El Alto and associated with the ruling *mestizo* elite. This new ensemble, having no prior knowledge of such a plan, have now been advised by the Dutch NGO that they must sign an agreement stating that they will spend the 18000 bolivianos on transport and the provision of sand and gravel. They must sign the agreement by today, and not one word in the agreement, written by the Coordinator of the NGO in Holland and emailed to their volunteer with strict instructions, is to be changed if the project is to go ahead.

---

<sup>379</sup> ADEPCOCA, the Departmental Association of Coca Growers (*Asociación Departamental de Productores de Coca*), is a body whose aim is to represent the coca growers of all Yungas provinces. The organisation is responsible for issuing producers' identity cards, and charges a duty for each *cesto* of coca transported to La Paz, as well as promoting political activity such as protest marches and road blocks (Spedding 1997:124-125).

<sup>380</sup> The Law of Citizen Groups and Indigenous Peoples was passed in 2004. See Congreso Nacional (2004).

<sup>381</sup> The Annual Operating Plan (POA, *Plan Operativo Anual*) is a facet of Law 1551, the Popular Participation Law, (*Ley de Participación Popular*), passed in 1994 as a way to incorporate Bolivia's disperse population through decentralisation. According to the Law, 20% of the federal budget will be made the responsibility of local municipalities for infrastructure and development projects and budgets will be drawn up by local governments with the collaboration of OTBs (Organizaciones Territoriales de Base or grassroots organisations) (Conzelman 2007:117; Kohl and Farthing 2006:126). See also Albó and CIPCA (1999), Ayo (2004), Bolivian Government and USAID/Bolivia (n.d.), Gill (2000), Grey Postero (2001), Lenz (1999), Ministerio de Desarrollo Humano (1995), Ministerio de Desarrollo Sostenible y Medio Ambiente (1994), Ministerio de Participación Popular (2003) and Ticona and Albó (1997).

<sup>382</sup> The *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (National Revolutionary Movement) was responsible for implementing the Agrarian Reform of 1953 and bringing widespread Constitutional Reform to Bolivia in favour of the *campesino* majority. Since that time, however, they have moved gradually right, until MNR President Sanchez de Lozada ordered a fatal military crack-down on protesters in October 2003. See Klein (1969) and Kohl and Farthing (2006:45).

It is not the project in itself that they object to, or the contribution from the Fund. Quite aside from the fact that transport, sand and gravel for the project will not amount to 18 000 bolivianos, and that they will have difficulty making themselves accountable to the central government according to new laws, council members feel that this agreement is unreasonably inflexible. It has been written by someone most of the people in the room have never met, and those present resent the fact that they have not even been asked to comment on it, let alone had the opportunity to participate in the formulation of it. It seems however, that the NGO is still working on the assumption that Municipalities are, in line with their historical reputation, oppressive, white and elite, and that communities are good, pure, indigenous and downtrodden. No concessions are to be made to the Municipality.

The historical poignancy of the moment is not lost on anybody present. This is the first time in history that *campesinos* or coca-growers have been in charge of local government, and they are in no mood to bend to the dictatorial demands of a foreign organisation. It is certainly not lost on the foreign anthropologist cum volunteer who finds herself in the middle of this salsa, sitting on the raised platform on her last day in Chulumani armed only with strict instructions from Holland and without the authority to negotiate. As time passes and people become hungry, she sits on the platform and feels on her shoulders the heavy weight of culpability, real in its imagined-ness, of five hundred years of inequality, abuse and disrespect.

This dissertation began by situating the inhabitants of the Yungas within a global socio-historical context in which their relationships with outsiders (be they foreigners or non-indigenous elites) have been for the past five hundred years and still are characterised by a struggle for control over material production (most importantly, a struggle over the relations of coca production), and a struggle for control over cultural production (the relations of production of meaning, values and discourse, in particular the production of identities and the right to conceptualise and affirm one's own sense of self and place in the world) (See Chapter Two). I then went on to show how the coca production system laid the basis for the 'communicative ecosystem' in the Yungas, as it is through the mechanisms of production, consumption, distribution and exchange of the coca leaf, held together by relations of land ownership, labour exchange, and participation in unions and other organisations, that the communicative ecosystem is constructed and articulated (See Chapter Three). The structure of these relations dictates the nature of individuals' and groups' labour and recreational activities, their travel for trade, and hence their possibilities for interpersonal relationships (social networks or social capital) and communicative intercourse. When communication technologies such as radio and the Internet enter into this system, they form linkages in various ways to the already existing mechanisms of communication (See Chapters Four, Five and Six).

This final chapter directs the spotlight toward the development organisations (for our metaphoric purposes, 'organisms') that devote time and money toward making available ICT projects for the

service of communities.<sup>383</sup> I align myself with the postdevelopment critics (Escobar 1984; 1995; Esteva 1992; Ferguson 1994; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Hobart 1993; Sachs 1992) to argue that the 'development apparatus' (Escobar 1984:388) as it currently functions requires the production and reproduction of a 'development discourse' (Escobar 1984:384; 1995:111) generative of homogeneity, poverty and ignorance at the local level. Yet it is useful to adopt at the same time an 'actor-oriented' perspective that pays attention to the agency of local peoples in the creation of their own knowledges and the formulation of their own experiences (Arce and Long 2000:24; Long 1992; 2001; Long and Long 1992:26). The paradox lies in the fact that as development theory has moved away from a metanarrative of modernity and progress to one that pays more attention to local knowledges and local strategies (cf. Arce and Long 2000:6; Bebbington 2000; Blaikie 2000:1037; Long 1992; 2001), local people have aligned those very strategies to a modernist project of their own making (Arce and Long 2000). Yungas people have, in fact, a long history as individual market players and a not so recent history of searching for social ascension. While well-intentioned development organisations seek a certain manifestation of 'local community' and 'indigenous culture', those indigenous community members are looking ever outward to a future that includes words like 'progress' and a prescriptive type of 'educated' (Spalding 1990:92; cf. Nash 1979:310).<sup>384</sup>

Such disparate perspectives on the local reality can only be reconciled by the production of a discourse requiring a sometimes conscious, but mostly unconscious, *conspiracy* between a three-tiered system of international donors, intermediary organisations and local people. This discursive project is made possible by firstly, a *physical* and *sociocultural distance* between the three separate tiers, where physical distance denotes the thousands of kilometres between Bolivia and Holland, and *sociocultural distance* refers, in line with Bourdieu's *social distance*, to the distance between objective positions within a *field* (Bourdieu 1977:82). These distances facilitate a myopia to the differential characteristics of the lower tier which, if perceived, would belie the myth of homogeneity and hamper efforts to work within the discourse in order to secure funding (cf. Blaikie 2000:1038).<sup>385</sup> Secondly, it is made possible by a mechanism of *reinforcement*, whereby, as in media's *reinforcement theory*, audiences allow what they see to change their opinions only if they are predisposed to do so (Crisell 1986:197; Schramm and Roberts 1971), the audiences in this case being, of course, the development practitioners. The flip-side of *reinforcement theory*, is that media producers show the audience members what they want to see, and so it is with the local people who portray to development organisations the homogeneity, poverty and ignorance they look for, in part intentionally and strategically, knowing that funding is more likely to be forthcoming if they do so, and in part as a product of the historical internalisation of the dominant discourse (Escobar 1984; 1995; Foucault 1972), and an acceptance of hegemony (Gramsci 1971:12).

---

<sup>383</sup> See Van Niekerk (1994) for a study done of NGOs in Bolivia as a response to their rapid proliferation in the country and the expansion of their areas of work.

<sup>384</sup> Education was included within the 'basic needs' framework of the 1960s and 70s because it was thought to be a prerequisite to the enjoyment of the other basic benefits (Spalding 1990:92).

<sup>385</sup> Blaikie (2000:1038) calls to account those postmodernist theorists who, in their rush to deconstruct existing development paradigms, conjure instead an 'unexamined and "thin", even romanticised, notion of the local, as the site of resistance' and 'a naivety or deliberate myopia about some of the more questionable social agendas that appear at local sites of power...'



While such a conspiracy appears harmonious, it is damaging on two counts. Firstly, because it does not acknowledge a political economy of social and economic differentiation within the coca *field*, and therefore cannot be sustained in practical terms. Projects designed according to such myths are unlikely to respond to communities' real needs, nor be practically sustainable in the long-term. Secondly, because it engenders a reproduction of historical discourses and a maintenance of the unequal power relations between local people and outsiders, founded on the ability to effect control over the production of material and cultural resources. However - and here I qualify my curious use of the term *conspiracy*, which implies more wilful and conscious agency than would seem to be involved in the acts of production being discussed - there do exist spaces to manoeuvre and to challenge the discourse.

As they have always done with varying intensity over the years, locals continually adopt ways of maintaining a dominant discourse of their own, in opposition to what becomes, for them, the *counter-discourse* (Foucault 1977:209; Dirks et al. 1994; Harris 1995; Stephenson 2000). According to an individual's positioning within the coca *field*, he or she may have more or less space and capacity to contribute to this discourse. As a group, however, coca growers have a certain level of capacity to affect discourses precisely because of the relatively powerful position they occupy within the relations of coca production. Development projects become, in this, another site of the insider-outsider struggle over the modes of material and cultural production. Yet development organisations also have room to move. What is required is a reduction in the physical and sociocultural distances between the different tiers, and a shift on the part of development organisations to viewing themselves not as *outside* the communicative ecosystem, but as *outsiders* who have *entered* the communicative ecosystem as 'organisms' who bring certain types of capital to the coca *field* from outside, some of which it is hoped will be convertible inside the *field*.

The main ethnographic material for this chapter is drawn from the communicative interactions that took place between the various actors involved with Chulumani's telecentre project, as well as in negotiations regarding school construction projects and a proposed Wi-Fi Internet system that would connect various communities around Chulumani to the Internet via a wireless system using a mobile antenna. The chapter will begin by outlining the three-tiered system discussed above and analysing the communication practices that occurred between the Dutch donor NGO (*Vida*) and the La Paz-based intermediary NGO (*Alma*) responsible for the telecentre, before discussing how these organisations communicated and coordinated with other NGOs and already existing communications initiatives in the area; in particular, Radio Yungas and its administrating NGO, *Claridad*.

I will then turn to the discourses of homogeneity, poverty and ignorance sustained and reproduced by the various actors despite local people's opposing experiences of this, before providing ethnographic detail as to the communicative interactions that occurred between NGOs and local Yungas residents, including telecentre staff, authorities and grassroots communities. In doing so, I

will draw upon the literature surrounding 'participation' in development practice, as this is the area that has been most concerned with the methods used to communicate with local people in a development context, and to look for ways of shifting the power balance by including local people more genuinely in project planning and implementation (Cernea 1985; 1989; Chambers 1983; 1992; Kapoor 2002; Motteux et al. 1999; Rahnema 1990; 1996). Attention will be paid to the ways in which local people sought their own participation and communication, using, wherever possible, avenues already available to them within the communicative ecosystem. In the final section I will assess the effects of NGOs' communicative activities within the coca *field*, in terms of both practical implications for the projects, and in terms of the consequences for historical insider-outsider power relations founded on struggles over material and cultural production.

### **Donors, Intermediaries and Local People: The Three Tiers of Physical and Sociocultural Distance**

'Alfonso hasn't written to the donors for a week. He won't write back to them', Annette complained to me. 'Why not?' I asked Alfonso, who was sitting at the computer in *Alma's* La Paz office, with his back to us. *Alma* is the La Paz-based intermediary NGO that is charged with the administration of Chulumani's telecentre with funding from the Dutch NGO *Vida* (See Chapter Six). 'They want me to send them three different quotes for an antenna', he replied. 'But there aren't three different companies in Bolivia.' 'Well, tell them that', I suggested. 'I can't! They won't believe me! They'll think I'm lying!'<sup>386</sup>

Carlos Mamani, a historian of Aymara descent, told me in my early days in La Paz, 'Experts come from the rich countries and they want to help the poor countries, but they need intermediaries. So, there is a whole middle class of Bolivians who act as intermediaries. And most of the money stays there'. These middle-class Bolivians formed the middle strata in the three-tiered structure of what was to become my multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995; Fischer 2003). Ensclosed in middle-class, though badly-paid and economically struggling urban Bolivia, they found themselves suspended precariously between the foreign donors in Europe and the local 'beneficiaries' in the Yungas, at an impractical distance from both, physically, socially and culturally.

Since NGO *Vida* had no personnel permanently on the ground in Bolivia, the two NGOs managed the physical distance that lay between them - several thousand kilometres of the North Atlantic Ocean and a sizable chunk of Brazil - by employing the use of the Internet with which to communicate (cf. Skuse and Cousins 2007). Most of their communication was via email and chat, very occasionally complemented with face-to-face communication in those instances in which the

---

<sup>386</sup> On this particular occasion, Alfonso was attempting to secure funding for further telecentres from a German organisation.

Coordinator of *Vida* visited Bolivia. She did so on two occasions while I was undertaking my fieldwork. In turn, communication between Holland and Chulumani was mediated by the intermediary organisation, whose staff used email and chat to communicate with the telecentre staff in the Yungas.

However, this physical distance, while not amounting to the same thing as social distance, did certainly not help to reduce the social gap, nor the cultural gap that existed between the three tiers and which ultimately, coupled with the poor management of physical distance, led to the breakdown of the communication chain, as will be discussed shortly. Bourdieu (1977:82) describes 'social distance' as the 'present and past positions in the social structure that biological individuals carry with them, at all times and in all places, in the form of dispositions which are so many marks of *social position*' (ibid.) (in other words, class habitus), and at the same time, 'so many reminders of this distance and of the conduct required in order to "keep one's distance" or to manipulate it strategically...' (ibid.). Whether we take the idiosyncratically Bolivian perspective of the 'thought categories' (Barnes 1954:45) of *blanco* (foreigner, upper-class), *mestizo* (urban, upper-middle class) and *campesino/indigena* (rural, lower class) (Rivera 1994; Spedding 1994; See Chapter Three) or a more generic world perspective of Northern/Western (developed/rich), Southern and urban (developing/middle-class) and Southern and rural (developing/poor), there is a three-tiered structure of positions in place. These positions are designated according to economic capital, cultural capital (education and skills), and symbolic capital (economic capital recognised as cultural capital), and members of each tier carry around with them the corresponding system of dispositions that directs their practice. I prefer to use the term 'socio-cultural distance' as it allows for an added cultural dimension that is perhaps not present in Bourdieu's analysis of class structure within a society.

So, Alfonso must 'keep his distance' (Bourdieu 1977:82) by not deigning to tell the donors a truth they do not want to hear, and Annette, who has lived and studied in Europe, looks to me for affirmation when telling Alfonso that postponing the Internet courses planned for the telecentre would mean a withdrawal of funding from their German donors. 'The Germans like to do everything on time, don't they? You must have the same mentality over there, mustn't you?' Meanwhile, *Vida*'s Netherlands-based Coordinator, Karen, strategically manipulates both physical and social distance in selecting which pieces of information to impart to the intermediaries at which time. On one occasion she communicated to me, as volunteer based in Chulumani, that it would be best not to let *Alma* know about the school construction and computer projects that *Vida* was going ahead with. It would result that *Vida* had more room to manoeuvre strategically, because of the economic capital they enjoyed in comparison to *Alma*, whose strategic withholding of information did them little favours. 'They want to know everything! They want to control us for everything! They take more money off us even for breathing!!' said one of *Alma*'s staff members upon being asked to send a list of computer serial numbers to Holland.

Email and sporadic visits proved to be insufficient for the management of the physical and socio-cultural distances that existed between the two NGOs, and the badly executed strategies of exchange and withholding of information led ultimately to an irreconcilable level of mistrust between the organisations (Campbell 2000:192; Putnam 1993:167; Schuller et al. 2000:14-19).<sup>387</sup> In July 2004, the local telecentre staff members and I received an official letter from *Vida*, as an email attachment which I accessed on a visit to La Paz. It read:

Via this letter, we wish to communicate to you that due to the interruption of the Internet connection of the telecentres in Chulumani and Coroico, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June of this year a request was made to NGO *Alma* that they make available to us a report indicating the motives for said interruption. Unfortunately, as of this day, we have had no reply.

On a subsequent visit to Chulumani, Karen held a seminar entitled, 'For a globalisation without corruption', in which she detailed the acts of corruption that it seemed had taken place in connection with the projects. The official letter announcing these workshops read, 'Many NGOs were designed and implemented behind closed doors with the principal objective being to channel international funds for their own interests.' What eventually occurred was a complete break-down of communication between the two organisations that in turn signalled a rupture in communication between Holland and Chulumani, with the intermediaries, whose communication with the Yungas was in any case tenuous, having dropped away from the communication chain.

Mistrust was a further cause for lost opportunities to work constructively with other organisations and initiatives already operating in the region (cf. Campbell 2000:192; Putnam 1993:167; Schuller et al. 2000:14-19). Gumucio-Dagron (2004a:10) refers to 'convergence and networking' as one of the five essential elements of a successful ICT project, meaning both the building of institutional alliances with local organisations and other development organisations working in the area, as well as efforts at technological convergence with media already available (cf. CRIS Bolivia 2003:39; Gómez and Martínez 2001:8; Gumucio-Dagron 2003:5-6). He writes:

ICT projects that are converging towards other communication projects such as community radio have better chances to succeed because they will be inheriting a vast quantity of accumulated experience and a whole history of development and participation.

(Gumucio-Dagron 2004a:11)

Looking for creative ways to marry the old and new technologies of radio and Internet in an 'eco-friendly' way may have signalled possibilities for affording a greater number of people access to information otherwise unavailable, and rendering it useful through adaptation to local needs, local culture and local languages (cf. Girard 2001; Gumucio-Dagron 2004a; Hughes 2003; Tacchi et al.

---

<sup>387</sup> Putnam (1993:167) sees trust as one of the features of social organisation that inheres in his definition of social capital, along with norms and networks. Together, he writes, these can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action.

2003a; See Chapter Six). This did not occur, because of the sociocultural distance and consequent mistrust experienced between NGO *Vida* and Radio Yungas' administrating NGO, *Claridad*. After the difficult break-up between *Alma* and *Vida*, and having been failed by NGOs on several prior occasions, Karen vowed never to work with another intermediary NGO, writing in an email, 'They want just the same things. We refuse to work with any more intermediary organisations'.

This snub was extended to include the radio. Radio Yungas had previously had access to an Internet line provided by the project, and after this line was discontinued, radio staff members would visit the telecentre to search for news to broadcast, a service which they received for free under an agreement with NGO *Alma*. Karen reversed this agreement upon becoming aware of it during a visit and, indignant that the radio were charging the telecentre to place advertisements, explained to the radio's Director that the telecentre needed to sustain itself economically, just as the radio did. The Director's terse and defensive reply was, 'Why don't you put a line in the radio once and for all, and that way we won't have to keep coming here?' He indicated that he would pay for today, but would need to discuss the matter with the Director of *Alma*, demonstrating the resentment directed toward that socioculturally distant upper tier of domineering outsiders.<sup>388</sup> Such sibling rivalry (older sister, younger brother?)<sup>389</sup> also led to isolated telecentre initiatives, as *Claridad* opened a telecentre in Irupana and found a lack of Internet access in Chulumani served as an obstacle to the creation of a planned 'Yungueñan Network' of telecentres, which was designed to work in conjunction with local radios (See Chapter Five). According to *Claridad's* Director, they had secured funding for a telecentre in Chulumani, but had decided against creating competition for *Vida*.<sup>390</sup>

One of the functions of this three-tiered system of sociocultural and physical distance was a potential homogenisation of each of the tiers, such that the bottom tier, the 'local people', were able to be neatly and uniformly placed within their corresponding category of *campesino/indigena* (rural, lower class) or Southern and rural (developing/poor). Donors, intermediary organisations, and local people, through the use of distance and miscommunication between each of the three tiers, conspire to produce and reproduce a discourse of homogeneity in poverty and ignorance, as required for the reproductive functioning of the 'development apparatus' (Escobar 1984). Such a conspiracy of misrepresentation, its utility and its negative effects, will provide the focus of the following section.

---

<sup>388</sup> No longer able to access the telecentre for free, one radio staff member had the presence of mind to take advantage of the fact that I was supervising the telecentre as well as volunteering with the radio, and asked me to search for information on the Internet for his radio programme. When *Claridad's* telecentre opened in Irupana, the *corresponsal* in that town would visit the telecentre, and then radio through the information to the central office via the *cajita* for broadcast on Radio Yungas' programmes. In this way, staff members made strategic use of the media available to access information and make it accessible to the listeners.

<sup>389</sup> In fact, *Vida's* coordinator was Bolivian, but had lived in Europe for 20 years, meaning that her assumed and therefore symbolic cultural capital, and the practices that she had adopted, placed her in the upper tier. In appearance, she also fitted into the category of *blanco/foreigner*.

<sup>390</sup> They have since opened a telecentre in Chulumani, and *Vida's* telecentre is struggling as a result (personal communication from coordinator of *Vida*).

## The Misconception Conspiracy: The Three Tiers Work to Maintain Discourses of Homogeneity, Poverty and Ignorance

In his work entitled *Myths of Rural Andean Development*, Pierre de Zutter (1994:82) writes that the organisation of the *ayllu*<sup>391</sup> sought to balance unity with diversity. While the 'reproduction and betterment of the local ecosystem (natural environment and human environment)<sup>392</sup> demanded a collective management of territory, and strict norms which led to the homogenisation of certain family practices', it was recognised that the community consisted of families with differing resources, differing rights and obligations, differing economic, social, cultural and political roles (ibid.). On the other hand, he writes, modern society and development practice are based on the concept of homogeneity, and when applied to the Andean reality, the attempt becomes a futile one of forging unity through homogeneity, rather than through diversity (ibid.:83). As established in previous chapters, both the Yungas as a region and Yungas communities are highly differentiated, and community members have the constant task of negotiating an equilibrium between communal and individual rights and obligations (see Chapter Three). Poverty and knowledge, for them, is expressed in relation to a person's position within the coca production system, or coca *field* (Bourdieu 1984; 1986) and the capital that they have in a credit and exchange system based upon land, labour and organisational participation.

Yet such complexity does not lend itself to development projects with budgets and timelines and progress reports (Blaikie 2000:1041). Through maintaining both a physical and a sociocultural distance from their target population, coupled with a tendency toward *reinforcement* (Crisell 1986:197; Schramm and Roberts 1971), development organisations are able to sustain and reproduce a 'development discourse' (Escobar 1984:384; 1995:111; Esteva 1992:7) of poverty and ignorance – conditions in need of treatment by the 'development apparatus' (Escobar 1984:388) - and homogeneity in community, which will facilitate such treatment (cf. Blaikie 2000:1041).<sup>393</sup> This discourse is sustained through documentation, through studies and statistics, through policy decisions, through ways of speaking and acting (cf. Blaikie 2000:1040; Escobar 1988:431), and reinforced and reproduced by the local people themselves, partly strategically, and partly as an inadvertent internalisation of the dominant 'development discourse' (Escobar 1984; 1995; Foucault 1972) and an acceptance of the prevailing hegemony (Gramsci 1971:12).

---

<sup>391</sup> The Aymara term *ayllu* is commonly used to refer to an indigenous 'community' or village of between 200 and 500 inhabitants in the *altiplano* that is governed by traditional models of organisation and leadership, although it is thought that this usage may have originated during colonial times (Spedding and Llanos 1999:1). See Klein 1993.

<sup>392</sup> 'Medio natural y medio humano' (de Zutter 1994:82).

<sup>393</sup> Blaikie (2000:1041) writes that one aspect in the reproduction of the development industry is its need for narratives that can be understood and implemented. 'These have to be fairly simple, elegant, and appealingly told, and they have to resonate with the professional and cultural repertoires of their constituencies. For most, this means narratives with claims for universal validity and generalisation with clear outlines and contours. They must reduce the bureaucratic anxiousness for decisionmakers that goes with uncertainty and ambiguity. They must also stabilise policy recommendations, and in this sense are 'discursive closures' (Hajer, 1995). As long as a development narrative does these things, it has a chance of enduring...' (See Hajer 1995:62).



## NGOs Discoursing Homogeneity in Poverty and Ignorance

Sorry. I can't show the people back home photos of such a nice school. You won't get anything from them. No way.

NGO *Vida's* coordinator uttered these words upon viewing the school that the proud inhabitants of a small town had built with their own hands and money, an effort which they would now learn was not to be rewarded with the financial assistance to purchase computers for the students, as they had hoped. This was one of those rare moments in which the constant but usually latent process of what Escobar (1984:383) calls the production of 'discourse on the underdevelopment of the Third World constructed by the developed countries' came quite visibly to the surface, expressed in words.<sup>394</sup> As one of the postdevelopment critics who began to apply the concept of Foucault's (1972) discourse to development during the 1980s and 90s (cf. Apffel-Marglin and Marglin 1990; Cowen and Shenton 1995; Crush 1995; Dirks et al. 1994; Escobar 1984; 1988; 1991; 1992; 1995; Esteva 1992; Ferguson 1994; Gardner and Lewis 1996; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Hobart 1993; Rahnama and Bawtree 1997; Rew 1997; Sachs 1992; Schrijvers 1993), Escobar writes:

Without examining development as discourse we cannot understand the systematic ways in which the Western developed countries have been able to manage and control and, in many ways, even create the Third World politically, economically, sociologically and culturally.

(1984:384)

Discourses, as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972:49), serve the function of naming, analysing, rectifying, classifying, dividing, describing, explaining and judging objects and in so doing, making them 'manifest, nameable and describable' (ibid.:41). It follows, that 'development discourse' creates abnormalities such as 'underdeveloped', 'malnourished,' 'illiterate', that will later be treated and reformed (Escobar 1984:387; cf. 1995:106-7). Since leading institutions such as the World Bank shifted their focus at least nominally from economic growth to poverty reduction and basic needs in the 1960s and 1970s (Peet 2003:118; Spalding 1990), the words 'poverty' and 'poor,' and phrases such as 'pro-poor outcomes' have become indispensable in any development organisation's policy schedules and project proposals.<sup>395</sup> Today, with the first of the Millennium Development Goals being to 'eradicate

---

<sup>394</sup> Foucault (1972:48-9) is at pains to stress that discourses, 'in the form in which they can be heard or read, are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words... in analysing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice'. Discourses are not, he writes, groups of signs, but are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972:49).

<sup>395</sup> The 'basic needs' were thought to include nutrition, potable water and sanitation, health care, education and shelter (Spalding 1990:91). See also Seers (1971; 1981).

extreme poverty and hunger' (United Nations Millennium Project 2005:xii),<sup>396</sup> and with the World Bank's mission statement, 'our dream is a world without poverty' (Peet 2003:1 cf. World Bank 2001; World Bank 2007<sup>397</sup>), organisations without poverty to combat find themselves on the fringes of the *raison d'être* of development.

So, regardless of whether we are aligned with Escobar's sombre view that the production of development discourse is a means for 'Western' countries to effect domination over the 'Third World' (Escobar 1984:377), NGO *Vida*, as an 'agent of the deployment of development' and part of the 'network of new sites of power' which constitute the 'apparatus of development' (Escobar 1984:388), must be complicit in constructing the objects of the development discourse in certain ways. In this case, they must constitute the objects as 'poor' in order to justify and sustain the development that they are deploying, and to receive the funding that they need to carry out their projects. Hence, a poor Yungas is constructed on *Vida's* website, where it is stated that the organisation builds schools in the 'most desolate towns of Bolivia' (Stichting Panfluit Bolivia 2007).

As a general phenomenon of the rural area of Bolivia, there is a lot of poverty and illiteracy.

The families have a minimum of 6 children. The majority of the families are very poor and don't have a fixed income...

(ibid.)

In fact, families with more than 6 children are the exception in the Yungas today, although certainly not unheard of, and not having a fixed income does not necessarily translate to precariousness, when a large windfall can be relied upon every three or four months after the coca harvest (cf. Spedding 2004). While the intermediary NGO *Alma* differentiate to some extent between the two simplified levels of *pueblo* and *campo*, necessarily having to select populations that fulfil certain basic requirements for sustaining a telecentre (Ribera 2003:37), in their funding proposal they too fall back upon generalised discourses of rural poverty to illustrate, using tables, the difference between the widespread poverty of the 'rural area' as compared to that of the general population of Bolivia (Ribera 2003:42-44).<sup>398</sup> One elderly woman from the town, who is not atypical in supplementing her income with remittances from an overseas son, says, 'The foreigners have a bad image of us – they think we're all poor, that we don't have enough to eat. But we have everything! Thanks to the coca.'

---

<sup>396</sup> Within this goal, Target 1 is to 'Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day', and Target 2 is to 'Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger' (United Nations Millennium Project 2005:xii).

<sup>397</sup> This World Bank document is entitled *World Bank Group: Working For a World Free of Poverty* (World Bank 2007b). See also the World Bank website, with slogan, 'Working for a World Free of Poverty', at <http://www.worldbank.org/>.

<sup>398</sup> The basic requirements listed are: 'Basic services, electricity, a school of approximately 1000 students divided into different time-slots, a population of approximately 3000 inhabitants, income per capita, economic indicators, economically active population, level of schooling, level of poverty, number of existing organisations' (Ribera 2003:37).

Accompanying discourses of poverty as another prerequisite for the smooth functioning of the development discourse, are discourses of ignorance. To set the ball rolling, Karl Mannheim wrote in 1950, 'As democratic processes become widespread, it becomes more and more difficult to permit the masses to remain in a state of ignorance' (cited in Freire 2006:39; cf. Freire 1972). During the 1960s, Rogers (1962) developed his 'diffusion of innovations' approach, which involved information and technologies being transmitted from knowledgeable experts to the necessarily ignorant passive receivers of the Third World (cf. Gumucio-Dagron n.d.:8; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006:xvi-xviii; Lievrouw 2002; Rogers 1971; Waisbord n.d.:4).<sup>399</sup> This approach continues to inform development practice, despite the greater preoccupation and respect for local knowledges and local social ways of being that have accompanied a shift away from modernisation theory and technocratic top-down approaches of technology and information dissemination in recent years (cf. Arce and Long 2000:186; Waisbord n.d.:17).<sup>400</sup>

It is here that a conflict arises, as development organisations attempt to negotiate a respect for local knowledges and at the same time to accommodate discourses of local ignorance that legitimate projects geared toward information dissemination and access to external knowledges. Arce and Long (2000:2) write of this 'contradictory character of Western discourses on modernity and globality, which give promise of access to new forms of knowledge and resources, but often end up denying that people can in fact think, argue and act for themselves.' On the one hand, *Alma* construct ignorance by outlining in their proposal how poverty is the result of 'The lack of: TRAINING, EDUCATIONAL GROUNDING, INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION'<sup>401</sup> (Ribera 2003:24), and how access to the Internet will solve this problem by 'offering access to new and more diverse sources of knowledge and information' (ibid.:94). *Vida's* coordinator likewise asserts that *campesinos* will need to use the Internet to look up information, which they presumably lack, about how to better their agricultural products, while their website reads:

In Bolivia, more than sixty percent of the population is illiterate. Above all, in the rural area where people almost do not have access to education and do not have the luck of having a better future.

(Stichting Panfluit Bolivia 2007)

While it is unclear to what use so many illiterate people would put the Internet, the fact that Bolivian literacy is calculated at 87.72% according to the census of 2001 (79.32% for rural La Paz) (INE 2007), and that almost all children in the Yungas have access to at least some years of schooling, highlights the nature of the processes of production occurring. On the other hand, however, both

---

<sup>399</sup> Seers (1971; 1981) writes about the transfer of knowledge and ideas as part of the basic needs approach. In 1971, he made the point that a 'naïve transfer without adaptation' would be harmful (Seers 1971:31), while in 1981 he wrote about 'spreading information' about health care, and so on, via extension services, through the school system and radio (Seers 1981:749).

<sup>400</sup> See also Chambers (1992), Freire (2006; 1972), Hobart (1993), Nederveen Pieterse (1995; 2001), Radcliffe (2006), Rahnema (1990), van der Ploeg (1993) and Viola Recasens (2000:21-23).

<sup>401</sup> 'La falta de: CAPACITACION – FORMACION, INFORMACION Y COMUNICACION' (Ribera 2003:24).

organisations are at pains to show that they recognise the value of local cultures. *Vida's* coordinator said to the assembled group at a community school that was soon to receive a donation of computing equipment from the organisation:

We do not want Primary School students to use the (computer) laboratory. The children in Bolivia need to learn to read and write first. The kids in Holland are already mechanised; they don't read. We have a culture, which is the Aymara culture, and we have to conserve that. The computers will only be for years eleven and twelve, and maybe ten.

Here, 'Aymara' is set up as something non-modern, and clearly incompatible with modern information and communication technologies. In fact, through taking so very seriously the mission of rejecting modernisation theses, the organisation have succeeded in turning the paradigm on its head by constructing an ignorance on the part of local people about their own cultures which, clearly, they are not capable of 'conserving' without being encouraged to do so (cf. Harris 1995). *Alma* undertake the same task when they write that children and young people from the rural areas will be given access to interactive educational packets 'about aspects of cultural identity and self-esteem, with the end of helping them to recognise their own capacities...' (Ribera 2003:35). The dilemma is thus reconciled; local knowledges are respected, at the same time that the development organisations remain needed in order to facilitate the fostering of local people's own cultural self-respect.

### **NGOs Discoursing the Homogenous Community**

Blaikie (2000:1046) writes that 'It is common for project documents to use the notion of "community" which provides an imaginary and convenient vehicle for the delivery of programme objectives.' While Yungas communities cannot by any means be called imaginary in that they are quite (visibly) separate entities, clearly delineated geographically, and whose members are connected to one another through the *sindicato*, through labour exchange, through the Church, through soccer, and so on, what the NGOs fail to do is to portray the community as anything other than homogenous and unified.<sup>402</sup> It is a 'postmodern myopia', writes Blaikie (2000:1046), that is responsible for a 'highly problematic notion of "community", as the site of unpenetrated, local, and authentic alterity and cultural difference.' In describing a Yungas community where a project is being implemented, *Vida's* website reads:

The region has lost part of its values such as the clothes, native language and others that in their era were important for development. However, it retains part of its culture such as the cultivation of the coca leaf, the ancient, sacred leaf which has always

---

<sup>402</sup> Looking across a valley, one can see small clusters of houses dotted periodically through the hills. These are individual communities and can be easily identified as separate communities.

helped to carry the heavy burden of poverty and hunger. Moreover, the election of their community authorities is carried out according to their rules and customs.

(Stichting Panfluit Bolivia 2007)

Gumucio-Dagron (2001b:11-12) has written that myths about the compact and pure nature of communities arose in the development field during the 1960s and 1970s when dependency theory was in vogue and political polarisations existed due to the struggles against military dictatorships in Latin America. 'Anything from the community level had an aura of purity and rightfulness' (Gumucio-Dagron 2001b:12). With reference to Orin Starn's notion of 'andinismo' which, paralleling Said's (1978) 'orientalism,' describes representations of Andean *campesinos* as being untouched and external to modern history (cf. Starn 1994:18), Spedding and Llanos (1999) describe what they name as a common perception of community among Andean scholars; the community as 'a small republic, an island that floats almost unperturbed – or perturbed only by evil outsiders – across the sea of history' (Spedding and Llanos 1999:2). In this republic, wealth is distributed within the community and land ownership is communal and continually redistributed to ensure that everyone's needs are satisfied (Spedding and Llanos 1999:3; cf. Seers 1981:748).<sup>403</sup>

*Vida's* method of project implementation for the Wi-Fi and school construction projects assumed and, in order to be successful, necessitated communities to be cohesive social units in which community members worked together harmoniously, members were supportive of each other and recognised and rewarded each other's efforts, and in any case, members were happy to sacrifice their own time and money for their community with little personal reward. Having established a discourse of homogenous rural poverty and ignorance, now a homogeneous and unified community is established, with community members having as a common goal to climb together out of their common and undesirable state. The vision that both *Alma* and *Vida* put across of the telecentre projects and the way that they would be used were in accordance with this idealised vision of community. As stated in the proposal, one of the objectives of the telecentre was to 'Strengthen the social grassroots organisations, promoting new leaders, helping to solve problems and the concrete needs of the community' (Ribera 2003:35). Aside from working together to make the projects a reality, community members would then use the project in a way that lead to a *community* (not individuals sharing a communality) that had better schooling, better leaders, stronger grassroots organisations, inhabitants whose voices are heard and whose rights are

---

<sup>403</sup> The notion of community put forward by Seers (1981:748) in advocating a basic needs approach is not unlike this one. He writes, 'The *community*, especially the village, also plays an important role in meeting basic needs. Neighbours often supplement the household's knowledge and resources in coping with medical emergencies, and even a village without a doctor usually has one or two people with traditional health skills. A child learns from an early age in a group of neighbourhood friends, and even the primary school he or she eventually enters may have been built by voluntary community labour. If a community wants its own water without waiting the very long time it might take public authorities to provide this, it will need to raise the money and muster a workforce for digging wells, trenches, etc. Acquaintances normally help in constructing dwellings. The community monitors crime, particularly where the local police force is small – or, as often, non-existent. Community organisations can also articulate local needs and press government agencies to provide resources and services' (Seers 1981:748). While all of this may be true, even for Yungas communities, the failure to acknowledge the differentiation and conflict likely to accompany all of these communal acts has the effect of portraying an idyllic, homogenous, conflict-free community, and projects planned with such conceptions of their target populations are unlikely to respond effectively to real local problems.

recognised, more income generating opportunities, better markets, more credit opportunities, more creativity and better health awareness (Ribera 2003:34-6).

In his work on Habermas, Pusey (1987:47) makes the point that 'traditional societies' are 'more conflict-ridden, more disordered, and perhaps even more "individualistic" and competitive than we may have supposed'. Now, Gumucio-Dagron writes, people working in development have had to reconceptualise communities as 'complex social universes' or 'clusters of interests and power struggles' (Gumucio-Dagron 2001b:12) that, rather than being homogenous or fully democratic, are fractured into groups of economic, political and social interests (ibid.; Gumucio-Dagron 2004a:5). Communities are made up of rich and poor, those who own more land and those who own less (cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2004a:5; Scott 1985), and these disparate interests will be quick to come to the surface when the possibility of a development project is put before the community for discussion and approval (Gumucio-Dagron 2001b:12). Gumucio-Dagron goes as far as to suggest that most development failures can in fact be attributed to the responsible organisation's inability to conceptualise the community as anything other than homogenous and compact (ibid.).

### **Contestations and Internalisations of the Discourse: Local Experiences of Homogeneity, Diversity, Community, Individuality, Poverty and Modernity**

It is a combination of factors that can be said to account for local people's contemporary experiences and perceptions of their lives, in terms of where they are situated in both local and global schemas of wealth and modernity and of how they form a part of the communities they live in. Historical factors tied into a political economy centred around coca are interwoven with more recent theses of modernity and progress that place people on a development time-scale in comparison with others. Discourses of poverty, ignorance and community are partly internalised and partly performed as people negotiate these changing experiences and perceptions daily.

In a situation perhaps slightly less harmonious than that found in de Zutter's (1994:82) portrayal of *ayllus* (see page 263 above), Yungas community members work each day to negotiate a resolution between two often conflictive social ways of being: 'community' and 'individuality' (cf. Barnes 1954:50). Certainly, the community is an important social structure that guides daily activities and conduct to what is by no means an insignificant extent. As discussed in Chapter Three, the organisational structure of the *sindicato* is responsible for making decisions about those lands that are communally owned (cf. Spedding 2004:81), about whether individual land owners may sell or alter their land (Spedding and Llanos 1999:46; Spedding 1997:134), and for ensuring that community members fulfill obligations such as communal work days, attending meetings and blockades and paying quotas for the upkeep of communal services (See Chapter Three). Community solidarity is reproduced and communicated through the contained warfare of intercommunity soccer matches and through the annual *fiestas* of patron saints.



However, community membership does not necessitate homogeneity (cf. Arce and Long 2000:19).<sup>404</sup> In fact, the governing mechanisms mentioned above are set up precisely to account for and manage the individualism and the differentiation that are a part of community life (cf. Komadina 2001:90-91).<sup>405</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, it is believed that Yungas communities have tended to be more individualist than their *altiplano* counterparts since the first Aymara colonists arrived to settle them, and that a rapid turnover of inhabitants, due to constant migration and a high death rate, would have led to a lesser incidence of community cohesion (CIPCA 1976:25; cf. Pusey 1987:47). This may have contributed to the largely individualist system of land ownership existing in the Yungas today, where land is individually owned, the property market is open and fluid (Rivera 1994:3; See Chapter Three), and coca growers are individual market traders (Spedding and Llanos 1999:7).<sup>406</sup>

'Poverty' then, rather than being something shared by communities as a whole as expressed by the NGOs, is for local people (stated in 'experience-distant' terms [Geertz 1989]), the expression of a relative position within the coca *field*, of the different types of capital possessed, and of habitus.<sup>407</sup> To begin with, there exists the *pueblo-campo* distinction discussed in Chapter Three, translatable to the concretely imagined thought categories of labour, class and ethnicity. According to this schema, producers (indigenous) are thought to be poorer than non-producers (*mestizos/ blancos*) by virtue of their ethnicity, hence the saying, 'The money whitens' (Rivera 1994:Chapter 1, p.5). The apparent contradictions to this rule are cause for tension, as demonstrated by townswoman Doña Carmen, who is not atypical in claiming that the *campesinos* are much wealthier than she but do not spend their money wisely (See Chapter Three).

They're not accustomed to dressing well. We dress well, so they think we have money... They prefer to buy a minibus, or a house, but they don't eat well. The middle class people worry about the body, nutrition, that's the difference.

Here, she demonstrates how perceptions of poverty are tied up with the habitus as a system that generates practices able to be classified, at the same time that it generates the systems of

---

<sup>404</sup> Arce and Long (2000:19) write, 'Only by understanding how different actors go about their various tasks and livelihood concerns, can we avoid the homogeneous picture of "community" solidarity. Differentiation entails allocations of responsibility, time and identity.'

<sup>405</sup> Komadina (2001:90-91) writes that democratic society necessitates a process of individualisation, which dissolves traditional collective belongings. However, the *sindicato* has become a symbolic grouping of individuals that is related to identity. It 'permitted the organisation of individuals in solid and easily recognisable groups' (ibid.:91).

<sup>406</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, it is believed that the existing system of land ownership has been in place in Yungas communities since at least the beginning of the Republic (CIPCA 1976:5; Spedding 2004:81). Even during *hacienda* times, *colonos* were granted individual land in usufruct to work in their spare time and were thus able to commercialise their coca as individual market players (CIPCA 1976:26).

<sup>407</sup> Of course, practitioners in recent years have looked for a more nuanced definition of poverty... According to Narayan (2000:31), poverty is 'an interlocking multidimensional phenomenon' that includes not just a lack of material wellbeing, but also psychological aspects of poverty that have to do with a lack of voice, power and independence. Slater and Tacchi (2004:27) define poverty as 'a complex condition that involves issues of voice, empowerment, rights and opportunities as well as material deprivation.' They claim that, 'many people define poverty in terms of a lack of choice and opportunity, inability to fulfil their potential, lack of voice and powerlessness' (ibid). One man from an Irupana community said to me, 'They talk about poverty, but I say, poverty of what? The economic part, you can obtain that. You can't obtain the cultural part'. When I asked another man whether he thought there was poverty in the region, he said, 'No. There is economic richness. There is spiritual poverty – the people don't study, don't read. They live off what people tell them. There are very few people who don't have money – more people do have money... All the foreign aid goes into pockets. Bolivia is so cunning – they make others believe we are poor in order to receive money. We're not poor.'

differentiation and appreciation of those practices, otherwise referred to as taste (Bourdieu 1984:170). For Doña Carmen and others of her ilk, the town habitus is one that corresponds to a middle-class system of dispositions, regardless of economic wealth in real terms.

Poverty is further defined by the possession of capital within the coca *field*. In line with our discussion of the coca production system in Chapter Three, those who may be considered to experience poverty are those who do not possess land, who lack social capital in the form of social networks that can be called upon and converted into labour or social support such as a monetary loan, and who lack cultural capital, which is able to be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu 1986). I will begin by discussing the first two. As we heard from Don Anton in Chapter Three: 'The poor people are those that don't have land. The unemployed people – they do paid work by the day, they have children. It's not enough' (cf. Narayan 2000; see Chapter Three).<sup>408</sup> This corresponds most often to migrants from the *altiplano* who are either temporarily residing in the Yungas, or recently arrived, and therefore do not own land.

Also poor, is the elderly man who must harvest by himself because he has no family (social capital). 'He has no brothers, no sons, no wife', says Teresa. 'Poor thing, I feel sorry for him. I wouldn't work anymore if that were me. I'd sell my land' (cf. Horst and Miller 2006:111; Keane 1994:612; Narayan 2000:49, 55-56; Wolf 2001:171). Communities then, are structured according to a differential distribution of various types of capital, and the *individual* members of a community must negotiate unity through diversity (de Zutter 1994:83), in order to maintain existing social relations and to achieve individual goals through communal social structures (Barnes 1954:50; Arce and Long 2000:10-2).

While coca growers have probably participated individually in the market since the sixteenth century (Spedding and Llanos 1999:7),<sup>409</sup> a tendency toward individualism, social ascension and material wealth is likely to have been further promoted through more recent developmentalist discourses of modernity and progress, disseminated through development extension programmes and the mass media (Arce and Long 2000:4, 22; Komadina 2001:90-1; Long 2000:185; de Zutter 1994:109; cf. Durkheim 1984; Parsons 1971; Seidman 1985; Lash 1987; Alexander 1987; Weber 1964; 1987).<sup>410</sup> Money is given more importance in the Yungas than in the *altiplano* (CIPCA

---

<sup>408</sup> Tales of the importance of land are also echoed throughout Narayan's (2000) study of people's conceptions of poverty in various countries.

<sup>409</sup> Arce and Long (2000:5) write of the 'developmentalist' relationship that was established between rich and poor countries, noting that 'Any idea of there having existed specific types of modernity linked to the past in these countries before the arrival of colonial rule and development aid was denied.'

<sup>410</sup> Lechner (1991:179-180) writes that for Parsons, 'living in modernity means being collectively oriented to certain values, but only some and only of the most general kind;... it means having to cope with differentiation, itself sustained by a complex flow of 'media'; it means having to manage personal autonomy, without the security of faith or community.' See eg: Parsons 1971. de Zutter (1994:109) writes that what he calls the 'modernising army of development' has worked, with the help of schools and the mass media, to instil 'the ideology of progress, consumption and individualism.' Arce and Long (2000:5) write that after 1945, 'the strategic idea of modernity was organised around attitudes and policies based on a sense of the superiority of those nations that had successfully modernised themselves.' The 'backward' countries of the so-called 'Third World' were thought to represent 'an earlier stage of technical inferiority and ignorance.' It was thought that these countries needed to strive for development and cultural modernity, and the 'modern' countries could help them to 'catch up' through a transfer of scientific knowledge. These ideas about modernity are internalised by local actors and appear in the assumptions that guide local practices and expectations (Arce and Long 2000:4). One young person from the town cited the television,

1976:55), and the paid work day (*jorna*) has become more common in recent times (cf. Spedding 2004:341; see Chapter Three). After the Agrarian Reform, coca growers found new opportunities for social mobility and for the accumulation of economic capital, some of them abandoning agricultural work and starting small businesses (CIPCA 1976:28; Knoerich 1969:10; Spedding 2004:81), and the coca boom of the 1980s brought still more opportunities for the accumulation of wealth (Léons 1997).<sup>411</sup> Alternative development projects such as Agroyungas (See Chapter Two) had the effect of strengthening individual, rather than communal economic identity, in that individual families, rather than whole communities, signed up to the project (cf. Léons 1997:151; Spedding 1989:8; see Chapter Two), and the resultant divisions and mistrust within communities remain to this day, with people zealously guarding their coca plots from trespassers (cf. Léons 1997).

The discourses of 'backwardness', poverty and ignorance that accompanied the modernisation thesis, as discussed above, can cause the local level to 'reproduce the world as the top sees it' (Escobar 1995:111; cf. Esteva 1992:7; Foucault 1972:49), as categories are created and made real, and people who are the objects of discourse begin to act, think and feel in certain ways according to what is being said or done about them or to them. Escobar writes:

...development became... so important that we began to think of ourselves as 'inferior,' as 'underdeveloped,' as 'ignorant,' that we began to doubt the value of our own cultures.

(1984:194)

Such feelings can be identified in comments, not uncommon, such as 'We're very backward, aren't we?' and in the common assertion that what is needed to cure poverty is 'more factories' (cf. Rostow 1971:18-19; Spalding 1990:95). Despite most people initially describing only those without land as poor, there were occasions when there would be a slippage into a discourse of homogeneous poverty in relation to outsiders, such that 'He who has everything is the rich guy, right? He who has everything, cars and so on.'<sup>412</sup> At an Afro-Bolivian Pre-Dialogue held in Chulumani in preparation for the Constituent Assembly, one of the facilitators said:

---

especially Mexican *telenovelas*, as having contributed to a quest for individual wealth, since they present ideals that involve the accumulation of material possessions for the individual.

<sup>411</sup> My neighbour told me with some nostalgia, 'In the 80s, everyone lived well. There was a lot of movement; a lot of circulation of money. Everyone earned money from coca. For example, a narcotrafficker who had a lot of money hired an architect to build him a house. The architect earned well, so he bought good clothes from the tailor. He didn't even try to get the tailor to lower the price. Even the taxi driver made money. If there was a drunk and he wanted to go to H: "How much will you take me to H for?" "100 bolivianos." "Okay, let's go," and he paid 100 bolivianos because he had money, in his pocket!

<sup>412</sup> When I asked a man who had worked in Argentina what social class he was from, he responded, 'The lower class (*baja*). Like all those here in the Yungas. In the city you see supermarkets – people go and fill up their trolleys with things, with all sorts of things. How do they do that? You won't see that here. Sure, within the lower class, there are also sub divisions. Upper, middle, lower. (*Alta, media, baja*). But the upper class here, it's not really upper class. I tell the people who think they're upper class because they have a car, I ask them straight to their face, "Did you pay tax for your car?" No, nobody here could pay tax for a car. If they paid tax, the price would go up many times. So they're not really from the upper class.'

The studies tell us we are poor. Sometimes we don't want to recognise it because poverty is bad. But the studies tell us we are poor.

There is also a perception of ignorance relative to outsiders, expressed through comments such as this one: 'I suppose they're more advanced (in terms of health knowledge) in other countries,' and 'The foreigners do so much study. The Bolivians don't study at all. Why are we like that? She (the foreigner) must know' (cf. de Zutter 1994:237).<sup>413</sup> So, cultural capital also comes to inhere in local definitions of poverty, as it is not only a marker of prestige (when converted into symbolic capital in misrepresentation of economic capital [Bourdieu 1977:171]), but also highly valued in instances in which it is capital that is able to be converted into economic capital in a wider field beyond the coca *field* (see Chapter Six). Computing skills, for instance, might translate to a job in the city, while coca-growing skills are not exchangeable outside of the *field*, and are therefore of less value.

It is here that we encounter once again the current paradox of development, for it was this externally-convertible value that local people sought in their understandings of the telecentre project, in stark contrast to the way in which it was presented by the NGOs, who had in mind a transformation of the local community environment, coupled with a valorising of local and 'traditional' cultures (Ribera 2003, see Chapter Six), not a mass exodus.<sup>414</sup> It was these disparate discourses and differing versions of modernity (cf. Blaikie 2000:1046), facilitated by a physical and a sociocultural distance, that led to a dysfunctional type of communication between the actors involved in project implementation.<sup>415</sup>

Yet it was a 'conspiracy of misconception' that facilitated the reproduction of what seemed to be a necessary discourse for the functioning of the development agenda, and it is here that perhaps Arce and Long (2000:24) have a point in advocating an 'actor-oriented' research approach. This pays attention to the 'diverse and discontinuous configurations of knowledge' (Long and Long 1992:26; cf. Long 1992; 2001), where discourse studies tends to focus more fatalistically on understanding how ('Western') development models discipline and transform alternative knowledges (cf. Little and Painter 1995).<sup>416</sup> In order for the NGOs to 'reinforce' the myths, local people were required to strategically present themselves as poor and in community solidarity, regardless of the way they actually experienced these conditions. 'They like us to be united, don't they?' said the General Secretary of a community to me as we tried to resolve a community conflict regarding the delegation of responsibility for a project. 'They will think we can't agree.' It was

---

<sup>413</sup> de Zutter (1994:237) writes how the vertical and imposing practice of 'external agents' who 'directed and educated the ignorant *campesino*' ended in traumatising local people, so that 'the Andean world became absorbed in a (a lot of the time apparent) inferiority complex and asked for more and more "training".'

<sup>414</sup> The telecentre project proposal states that providing Internet to poor rural communities will alleviate their poverty by facilitating better education, better community organisation, greater productivity and more options for insertion into the market, more employment opportunities, better urban planning, better credit management, as well as more effective communication (Ribera 2003:34-36).

<sup>415</sup> Blaikie (2000:1046) writes, 'It is increasingly being recognised that awkward differences in objectives usually occur (between development organisations and local people) and, so far, the postmodern naivete about the unexamined virtue of the local has swept them under the carpet.'

<sup>416</sup> Arce and Long (2000:24) write that rather than setting up a binary opposition between two types of knowledge ('Western' and 'non-Western'), 'one should attempt to deal with the intricate interplay and joint appropriation and transformation of different bodies of knowledge.'

important to him that news of this spat did not reach Holland. Apparently, it did not, for on one visit, when nine *dirigentes* from this very community had got together to go in search of her, the Coordinator exclaimed, 'That community are so well organised!' (cf. Arce and Long 2000:19).<sup>417</sup> With the context made clear, I will now move on to the practical matters of project implementation.

## NGOs: Communicating within the Discourse, Denying the Ecosystem

When Westerkamp (1994:93) wrote, 'Ecology implies balance. Acoustic ecology implies balance between sound and silence, between listening and soundmaking,' she was discussing alternative radio broadcasting, and the possibility of 'creating participating listeners, that is, listeners of the broadcast who could then also be receptive to the soundscape as a whole' (ibid.:88). We may apply this notion equally to any media intervention or, more broadly, to any development project where outsiders enter a communicative ecosystem and must learn to listen to it as well as to communicate within it. The development organisations who feature in this story enter the ecosystem of coca communications as 'organisms' who have a certain habitus and who bring with them certain types of capital, some of which has value within the coca *field* and is able to be converted and exchanged.

As members of the two upper tiers of our three tier system, meaning *blanco* (foreigner, upper class) and *mestizo* (urban, upper-middle class), the foreign donors and the urban intermediaries carried with them certain dispositions and 'present and past positions in the social structure' (habitus) (Bourdieu 1977:82) that situated them at a sociocultural distance relative to the local people (*campesino/indigena*, rural, lower class). These groups brought with them into the ecosystem certain types of capital that were recognised and valued within the coca *field*: economic capital, which it was hoped would be invested in local infrastructure and communication technologies; cultural capital in the form of skills externally acquired which could be put to use in realising the technical aspects of the projects, as well as being passed on to local people through training sessions, later to be converted into economic capital outside the *field*; and social capital in the form of network connections outside the coca *field* with individuals and groups who would be encouraged to donate their economic capital to the region. The symbolic capital that they possess arises as a recognition of those other forms of capital, generated from an intended misrecognition of economic capital.

A problem arises when we consider that the coca production system and the communicative ecosystem that is based upon it functions according to a schema of exchange and balancing of credit (Douglas 1990:xii; Mauss 1990). *Fields* are characterised by an 'unequal distribution of

---

<sup>417</sup> Arce and Long (2000:19) write, '...actors tend to bridge gaps, juxtapose ideas and practices and engage in displays and performances.'

capital' (Bourdieu 1986:246), and it is in those creases and pockets of capital residue, that power resides and builds (cf. Bourdieu 1986:243). Where there is an imbalance in the exchange of capital between two parties, the party that has been able to provide more is left with an accumulation of power in an arrangement that may translate to a patron-client relationship of the type reminiscent of the *hacienda* era (Wolf 2001:179). Bourdieu (1990) describes this as 'symbolic violence', where a credit debt or a gift can provide the basis for dependence and servitude (Bourdieu 1990:126) at the same time that it accrues symbolic capital to the giver. Like Bourdieu's French mason, who demanded payment in lieu of the customary 'gift' of a meal, exposing the economic interestedness of the transaction (Bourdieu 1977:173; see Chapter Three), the man quoted below refuses to misrecognise what he considers to be the true motivation behind development aid. He explains how he feels many of his fellow Yungueños continue to misrecognise it:

They say it's without obligation (*compromiso*). For example, they gave tractors, they've given trucks in many places. Everything is with obligation now. They're obligations to eradicate... like it or not, within a few years, eradication will come here to the traditional zone. But it will come to those who made a commitment (*compromiso*) with Agroyungas, those who have made a commitment with *Servir*<sup>418</sup>, because *Servir* is the same chola with a different *pollera*, as Agroyungas.

(Coca grower, Chulumani sector community)

When I had planned to give free computing classes in the telecentre, a neighbour suggested I should charge something, because, 'It seems it's human nature that we value things more if we have to pay for them. If it's free, no one goes, or no one takes it seriously. But if they have to pay, they take some pride in it.' Only now, I understand that asking for nothing in return signalled a denial of the reciprocity, and the exchange of capital, balanced or unbalanced, upon which the ecosystem of coca communications is founded. Likewise, I understand why it made no sense to people when I tried to reason that surely if no paper had been signed, then no one would be obliged to eradicate their coca fields. The following is an account of some of the communicative interactions that took place as part of the development projects of the two organisations, of the imbalance of exchange and of a denial of already existing communicative avenues and social processes.

### **Keeping the Communication Lines Open: Communication Flows between NGOs and Local People**

It had been four years since *Vida* had donated a sum of money to an Irupana community with which to build a new school. Upon visiting the community, the coordinator asked why nothing had been done as yet with the money. The perplexed community replied that they had no knowledge of

---

<sup>418</sup> An NGO that works with health and sanitation facilities and receives funding from USAID (2004).



such money. Within those four years, all authorities, teachers, even the Mayor had been replaced, and somewhere along the way the knowledge of this money had not been passed on (cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2001a:9).<sup>419</sup>

Due to the physical distance that separates the upper and the lower tiers, face-to-face contact between local people and members of NGO *Vida* rarely occur, and most of the communication that takes place is through intermediaries; initially NGO *Alma*, and later through volunteers such as myself. For information to pass between Holland and the Yungas, and vice versa, a string of different media had to be employed. An email would be sent to *Alma*'s office in La Paz, or a phone call made. During the brief period when Chulumani's telecentre was in operation, an email could then be sent on to the staff members of the telecentre, who may be directed to place an announcement on the radio, alerting the wider Yungas population of an upcoming course in the telecentre, or perhaps to walk across to the Town Hall to ask the Mayor if she would 'chat' with Holland.<sup>420</sup> After *Alma* fell away from the equation and the telecentre closed down, I would receive emails from *Vida* during a visit to La Paz, and then, after returning to the Yungas, had the option of using either the radio, telephone or travel, or a combination of these, to communicate with local communities.

The merits of each of these media were discussed in Chapter Four. For communities that had a functioning public phone, this medium could be employed to speak to a specific person (to 'narrowcast'; cf. Becker 2006; Hirst and Harrison 2007; Sterne 2005), although the likelihood that a person would be available or able to be located at the time of the phone call was slim.<sup>421</sup> As a broadcast medium set up to allow for 'false narrowcasting', the radio was useful for alerting a community to an impending visit and to request that a meeting be arranged, but since it was not immediately dialogic, it was best as a precursor to dialogic communication. The most effective form of communication was face-to-face, since it is immediately dialogic, it is narrowcasted, implying intimacy, and it is oral/aural and visual, meaning that secondary aspects of speech such as gesture and body language can also be detected (cf. Ricoeur 1991:147). Such communication necessitated travel, either my own, or those of community members taking advantage of a weekend visit to town. These visits were often used to arrange a meeting in the community, where a larger cross section of the community could become involved in the communication process.

---

<sup>419</sup> Gumucio-Dagron (2001a:9) writes, 'Communication has been neglected for too long in development projects, and still is. Even when development organisations and staff realise today that beneficiaries have to be involved, they fail to understand that without communication there can be no long-term dialogue with communities.'

<sup>420</sup> During the time of my fieldwork, *Alma* organised two courses during the same week: one a basic Internet course, and one on the Law of Popular Participation, and *Vida* organised one basic Internet course. Those who attended were exclusively from the town. The Mayor chatted with Holland on one or two occasions before the telecentre closed down.

<sup>421</sup> When telephoning one community's General Secretary, I would often be told that he was too drunk to come to the phone. The General Secretary denied this, saying that the person in charge of the phone had something against him and therefore aimed to portray him negatively. Usually a caller will be asked to call back in ten minutes while the person is located. Inevitably, several more calls will be made before the person arrives at the phone booth, and often the phone will be busy due to the fact that there is a limited time period during the day (evenings) when people are free from work commitments and the phone wires run hot.

This system of communication was unsatisfactory on two counts. Firstly, with so many linkage nodes between the origin of the information and its destination, there were too many potential error points, possibilities for rupture in the information flow and for misunderstandings (the 'Chinese whisper' factor). The most potent illustration of this for me can be found in one instance in which I received an email from Holland asking me to travel urgently to various communities to offer them the opportunity to be connected to Wi-Fi Internet. I was unable to answer the community members' questions about the project, being in possession of very little information, and none of us knew at that time that no study had been undertaken to assess whether or not the Wi-Fi system was viable in the area, given the mountainous topography. The school's Director was gracious, but explained that they had been promised some computers from the organisation five years ago, and until now they had received nothing. He said:

The people don't believe anymore. They don't believe that we will receive anything. The kids go about disillusioned, desperate. We've been sending letters, etc., last year we sent letters. And nothing. It's a lot of promises. This has to go into your PhD. People need to know, we're not like that, bad – lots of people think we're bad, lazy, we don't do anything... but it's not like that. If you want to give us something, we say thank you, but don't lie to us.

Three years later, there is still no sign of such a project coming to fruition. Secondly, quite clearly this type of communication necessarily constituted an almost entirely one-way transfer of information, from Europe to the Yungas. In other words, antithetically to the 'participation' thesis (Cernea 1985; Chambers 1983; Chambers et al. 1989; Freire 1972; Rogers 2006), communication was not dialogic, but amounted to a one-way capital transfer (economic and cultural) with little opportunity for reciprocity. Staying with the above example, communities were offered a standard project, and were given the opportunity of accepting or rejecting it. If they accepted it, they were requested to communicate this in written letters, with appropriate signatures, to the various stakeholders in Holland, La Paz and the Municipality of Chulumani. It is to letters such as these that the Director referred. The foreign NGO operated within a 'paper culture' to the point that all building materials had to be bought outside of the Yungas, since few local tradespeople have the capacity to provide official invoices.<sup>422</sup> While not necessarily avoidable, this is nonetheless demonstrative of the sociocultural distance that existed between the two tiers, and of a myopia toward local modes of communication.

As it was, local people sought to communicate with the NGOs through avenues that already formed a part of their daily communicative activities within the ecosystem. As mentioned, if there were a matter that needed to be brought to the attention of the NGO, community members would usually incorporate a knock on the intermediary's door into their weekly shopping trip into town. They might

---

<sup>422</sup> As researcher Nidia Bustillos said to me with reference to the 'participant consent forms' required by Australian universities, 'Over there they're really in love with paper, aren't they? Everything has to be in writing. Here, you can't do it like that.'

take the opportunity to ask the intermediary to attend their monthly *sindicato* meeting, where a majority of the community would in any case be assembled. This way, without inconveniencing themselves too considerably, they achieved dialogic communication with an intermediary, who would then relay that information to the NGO if it were something that could not immediately be dealt with. As intermediary, I would then send a letter or an email during a subsequent visit to La Paz, or make a phone call if the matter was urgent. However, such an extended and fragmented mode of communication was not ideal because of the time-delay involved and because there was no direct contact between Holland and local people.

On occasions when community members needed to travel to La Paz for trade or other purposes, they were able to send letters, perhaps communicate via email, and on one occasion attempted unsuccessfully to meet face-to-face with members of NGO *Alma*. As these people shifted their geographical location, different communicative media became accessible to them, and of course it was those members within the community who were in a certain position within the coca *field*, and who had a certain level of capital, who participated in these kinds of communication (see Chapters Three and Four).

Local people also made use of the radio, both to alert their own community members to impending meetings or visits concerning the projects, and also to call to account organisations that did not appear to be delivering on their promises. One *dirigente* spoke about a drinking water project being implemented by an NGO in his community: 'It was supposed to be finished by August, and until now, nothing. I ask the representatives of (the NGO) to come to the community to explain the situation.' As a broadcast medium, radio has the added advantage of making such accusations public, so that the organisation in question has no option but to respond, hopefully favourably, to any grievances.

When a new telecentre was inaugurated in Irupana, and the Chulumani telecentre reopened shortly before my fieldwork ended, *dirigentes* were encouraged to open email accounts and communicate that way, yet this was not highly successful. Necessitating travel, requiring immediate economic investment and demanding literacy and computing skills (Kellner 2002), the Internet was not, at least not yet, an integral part of the communicative ecosystem and of people's everyday communicative practices.

Listening to the way in which local people themselves achieved communication with the NGOs (Westerkamp 1994) may provide some clues as to how the NGOs could communicate more effectively with local people. Use of the radio to alert communities of impending visits (which many organisations already do), meeting *dirigentes* in town during weekends, and attending *sindicato* meetings in the community are the most effective ways of maintaining communication with community residents. Ineffective communication in the case at hand was a result of both the physical distance between the tiers, which was unable to be compensated for by the

communicative media available (technologically and socially) to local people, and of the sociocultural distance (which was contributed to by the physical distance), which led to a failure on the part of the NGOs to employ the most effective means available of communicating with local people. Since it is unlikely that these distances will narrow, projects such as these would benefit from being decentralised, so that those people communicating directly with the local people may be in a position to make decisions and to engage in direct negotiation and communication with local people.

### **Participation through Consultative Meetings**

Those who have children should attend, and those who don't should too, because it's in the interests of everyone!

This was the call of the community loudspeaker shortly after *Vida's* coordinator had arrived unannounced in one community in the Mayor's chauffeur-driven vehicle. She had asked the teachers of the local school to call an urgent meeting with the children's parents so that they could discuss the construction of new school rooms, and now the call went out across the hills, surprising and annoying busy workers bent over their ripe coca bushes. While we waited for the community members to arrive, we chatted to some women who were collecting up their dried coca next to the school sports field, ready to take home and store away before being transported for sale. 'It's important for you,' said Karen, on learning that the women had no intention of attending the forecast meeting. One woman explained that meetings could only be held in the evenings as everyone worked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day (cf. IICD 2005:59). Karen insisted that she and I would go with her young daughter to take the coca to the house while the women made their way to the meeting. The woman looked us up and down and laughed. 'Ha, as if you'll be able to carry it!'

'Participation' is a part of the project undertaken by development theorists and practitioners since the 1970s, to move toward a development that respected people's agency in social and political life (Cernea 1985; Chambers 1983; 1992; 1997; Kapoor 2002; McGee 2002:94; Motteux et al. 1999; Rahnama 1990; 1996) and that sought a dialogic communication in which practitioners and local people exchanged and shared information (Freire 2006; 1972; Rogers 2006). The aim was that development would become more compatible with people's life worlds, and would be undertaken on their terms. Today, it is widely accepted within the development sector that local people must participate in all stages of a project, and that communication between implementing organisations and local peoples is paramount. It would seem, at least from the telecentre project proposal quoted below, that the NGOs in question are no different in harbouring these beliefs:

As a principle, *Alma* has incorporated the beneficiaries in all stages of the project, from the preliminary diagnosis, the conception of the project, their formulation, the execution of activities, follow-up and control... *Alma* has encouraged the integration of all the local

institutions in the participation and development of their projects. To that end, exchanges with organisations, producer associations, neighbours' groups, women's groups and diverse local organisations have taken place, and these have been made part of the project, inviting them to support the initiative.

(Ribera 2003:17)

However, the above anecdote illustrates two things: a genuine attempt at fostering participation among community members, but also a denial of the centrality of the coca production system and the way in which it dictates communicative practices. On this and other occasions, participation was restricted to only a few: the teachers and school directors, and those *dirigentes* who had felt an obligation to attend in order to keep up appearances of community cohesiveness and enthusiasm for the project, despite their pressing agricultural duties. The majority could not see the benefit in wasting precious hours, as when the leaves are ready, they must be harvested, and when the rain comes, the opportunity to plant must be seized. Since teachers are posted only for a short time, and *dirigentes* rotate, we can understand now why no one at a similar meeting in four years' time would be expected to know of the project.<sup>423</sup>

Yodelling out across the hills and imagining that all and sundry will drop their pick axes, pick up their skirts and come running smacks of that idealised vision of homogenous community discussed above (Blaikie 2000:1046; Gumucio-Dagron 2001b:11-12; Spedding and Llanos 1999:2-3), of a rhizomatic, non-hierarchical structure (Deleuze and Guattari 1988) and of unified and selfless interests. As it was, the 'determined roles and tasks' (de Zutter 1994:82) of those differentiated individuals necessitated that some, such as the woman with her coca, could not drop their bundles and attend the meeting, while others could. Instead, the NGO might have chosen to work through the already existing communicative mechanism of the *sindicato*, perhaps taking advantage of their monthly meetings, rather than disrupting daily work schedules (cf. IICD 2005:59). Then, they might have respected the local organisational structure, acknowledging the gatekeeping *dirigentes*, while recognising that they are not representative of each and every community member, and that they occupy a certain, privileged position within the coca *field* because of the capital they possess.<sup>424</sup>

---

<sup>423</sup> On another occasion, the Coordinator arrived at the High school in Chulumani at 8 a.m., unannounced, and requested a meeting be called immediately with the Director, the teachers and all the students' parents. She was informed that the Director had travelled to La Paz, and that many of the parents lived very far away and would be working in the fields currently; they only came in to town on weekends. The Coordinator had discovered that the computers that had been donated by her organisation were not being used and if a solution was not found immediately, the school's Internet line would be cut. The Deputy Director, who, like the Coordinator, was unaware that the school had not had an Internet line for some time, hurriedly called a meeting with the teachers. Because of a disregard for the local production and communicative systems, those who may have been most interested in the use to which the computers were being put – the parents – were excluded from the meeting, as they were going about their daily productive activities.

<sup>424</sup> While *Vida* did try to work with local *dirigentes*, it was only in a nominal sense in that they requested signatures from local authorities on official documents. de Zutter (1994:206) discusses the merits of working with either *dirigentes*, 'natural leaders' or the grassroots. He advocates working with neither of these three groups separately, but rather with 'the Andean organisation, with its organs and rules' (de Zutter 1994:206). Perhaps due to the fact that his work was undertaken in the *altiplano*, his communities are portrayed as much more unified than the ones I have encountered.

They might have thus angled toward unity through diversity, rather than through homogeneity (de Zutter 1994:83; Bourdieu 1977:86).<sup>425</sup>

Moving our gaze to the town, true to the participation maxim, a meeting was held to 'gauge the opinion of Chulumani' on the reopening of the telecentre. As discussed in the previous chapter, the meeting was held in the Town Hall, and eight people were invited: the Mayor, two councillors, a staff member of an NGO working in the area, the Manager of the Coop Society (originally from La Paz), a staff member of Radio Yungas, the owner of an important transport company, and the influential *ex-hacendado* of a nearby community. The latter of these said to me later:

The people have to know it's theirs. That it's not a telecentre belonging to the Dutch. You were in that meeting with Karen. You saw how the people from ANED were getting agitated. They think it belongs to the priests. They have to know that it's not Holland's and it's not the priests', but it's everyone's, so that everyone looks after it. And Karen called a meeting with five people.

Despite *Alma's* claims to the contrary, as seen in the quote above (Ribera 2003:17), the Executive Officer of the Federation of *Campesinos* in Chulumani told me that no one had been to speak to their organisation about the telecentre project and that they knew nothing of it.<sup>426</sup> In fact, no one in the Yungas really seemed to know much about it.<sup>427</sup> It was curious that a telecentre project whose professed aims included benefiting those most 'marginalised,' including 'poor' *campesinos*, invited only local town-dwelling elites to participate in the formulation of the project. It is not surprising then, that little sense of ownership was fostered within the *campesino* sector of the population, potentially leading to a reproduction of existing inequalities and divisions, in this case ethnic, within society (Gigler 2001:37; Gómez and Martínez 2001:1; Gumucio-Dagron 2004a:4; Rice 2002:106; Skuse and Cousins 2007:188).

### **Employing Local People: Participation through Labour**

In their study on ICT projects in Bolivia, IICD (2005:58) have written that while it makes sense to employ farmers to manage ICT centres, as they will be more likely to be able to anticipate the needs of their fellow farmers and community members than technical specialists, a problem arises

---

<sup>425</sup> Bourdieu (1977:86) discusses the singular habitus of the different members of a class or group, referring to the deviations that exist within the class habitus, but that are nonetheless merely 'structural variants' of the group habitus. He refers to this as diversity within homogeneity.

<sup>426</sup> When I asked one of the staff members of *Alma* whether they had consulted with local people and with the Federation of *Campesinos* about the project, the reply was affirmative.

<sup>427</sup> Gumucio-Dagron (2004a:4) writes, 'We can not claim social change without community participation, and this should take place from the first discussions about the potential of providing ICT support to a particular region. It is certainly not enough to discuss with government authorities or even with local authorities.'



in that farmers are just that: farmers, in full time employment.<sup>428</sup> Part of the design of NGO *Vida's* proposed Wi-Fi Internet project for communities was that a local person would be elected and trained to take on responsibility for looking after the community telecentre, and to teach computing and Internet skills to community members. The community would need to provide a wage for this person to operate the telecentre on a full-time basis.<sup>429</sup>

A regular wage for someone working in the town, such as a general employee of a hotel, is around 400 bolivianos (USD 50) per week. It would not be beyond the means of a coca-growing community of, say, 200 families, to contribute 2 bolivianos (USD 0.25) per week to cover this wage. However, there are various factors that need to be taken into consideration. On the one hand, there is likely to be contention between individuals within the community as to whether this is a good way to invest their money. This occurred at the High School in Chulumani, where parents were asked to pay a contribution of 2 bs (\$USD0.25) per month for a computing teacher. After a couple of months, the parents ceased to pay, and the teacher (who had taken on this work in addition to his normal, already excessive, teaching duties), ceased to give the classes. Tensions within the community may also come to the fore as those with less income are asked to contribute the same amount as those with more (cf. Scott 1985:91).

In addition, there may be resentment toward the young person receiving the community's money, especially where he or she may be deemed not to be doing a good job or not to be adequately trained, which is not unlikely after only a week of training, as proposed. This occurred in one community where a teacher from another part of the country had volunteered to give computing classes to children and did this in his spare time. Community members, however, perceived that he did not have the sufficient skills to perform the job adequately and began to rally against him. They did not realise that he was not being paid for this. Finally, there is likely to be conflict where one family's son or daughter has been chosen for the role to the detriment of another. At a meeting where people were to be elected for this role, a barrage of names was put forward, each person naming his own son or nephew (never daughter). A man later visited me at my house, keen to make sure that I knew that his son had been elected as one of the trainees, and that I had the correct names noted down.

Quite aside from this, coca production is likely to yield a greater income than a 400 b wage (cf. Spedding 2004:182-220), and more importantly, the young and most likely able-bodied person in question represents valuable labour input for an entire family unit.<sup>430</sup> If he or she takes on full-time work outside the coca field, the family must either enlist and owe more *ayni* or invest more money

---

<sup>428</sup> They write that a farmer trained in ICT will often have to leave the centre unattended because of pressing farming duties (IICD 2005:58). At the time of writing, they were however exploring the possibility of training young farmers, 'without major commitments' to run the ICT centres (ibid.).

<sup>429</sup> The elected people were to be trained by volunteer students from the Catholic University in La Paz. As this did not seem to be eventuating, the padre in charge of the newly opened telecentre in the parish in Chulumani, which opened shortly before the end of my time in the field, organised and gave some courses in the parish with the help of another volunteer teacher from a community.

<sup>430</sup> Spedding (2004) has undertaken a detailed study outlining the costs and investments involved in coca production and the profits to be obtained after taking into account a complex system of variables.

in paying a *jornal* to someone else.<sup>431</sup> Any increased cultural and symbolic capital associated with having an ICT expert in the family, and potential economic capital accumulation in a distant future as the young person moves away from the area, is unlikely to be considered to off-set the immediate economic loss that will eventuate. As such, it is most likely that a young person who takes on such a role will be able to commit only to sporadic work in the telecentre, balanced with his duties as a part of the coca production system.

All of this is succinctly demonstrated by a comparison between two communities involved in what was to be the Wi-Fi project. In the first, where three young men from coca growing families had been elected to share the role of telecentre caretaker, the computers remained in disuse. In another, in which a school teacher from La Paz had agreed to give classes as a volunteer in addition to his normal teaching duties, students and other community members began to attend classes as soon as the computers were installed. This teacher did not have obligations to fulfil as a member of the coca production system, and did not stand to lose valuable economic capital through neglecting those duties.

### **Delegating Democracy: Engaging Community Participation through Role Delegation**

During the lunch break of a community *sindicato* meeting, (these monthly meetings tend to last the entire day), two men nearby me discussed the naming of *dirigentes*. A man who had not attended the meeting in the morning had been named for a leadership role as a punishment for his absenteeism. 'You shouldn't name someone just on a whim, just because he wasn't at the meeting,' said one man. 'If he doesn't want to, you can't oblige him to. That's why the town doesn't progress. The *will* has to be there. It should no longer be that you can just grab a role (*cargo*) and put it away under your pillow. Now, people have to work.' They moved on to discuss the duration of leadership positions. 'One year is not enough. A project goes for two years. In two years a *dirigente* can finish a project. In one year, the *dirigente* leaves, and the project ends in nothing.'

The Spanish word used here for a leadership position, *cargo*, also means 'burden', so it should come as no surprise that being a *dirigente* is hard work. Taking on the responsibility for a project makes it a little harder. To begin with, labour time is lost as you are obliged to attend meetings or travel to purchase building materials. Added to this, *cargo*-related travel expenses must usually be paid out of your own pocket (cf. de Zutter 1994:71).<sup>432</sup> And for your pain, a deep-seated level of mistrust within communities means that there is a good likelihood that you will be accused of

---

<sup>431</sup> *Ayni* denotes a system of reciprocal work, while the *jornal* is a day's work paid in monetary terms (cf. Spedding 2004:136-149). See Chapter Three.

<sup>432</sup> Some communities collect quotas to pay for such things as *dirigentes'* travel expenses for *cargo*-related business, although most do not. de Zutter (1994:71) writes of local people employed as *promotores* (promoters) in development projects in the *altiplano*: 'There are very few times when the community really assumes the costs representing the maintenance of the "promotor", whether it be paying for his travel and expenses, whether it be working his plot to ensure his subsistence while he is dedicated to the work of support.'

embezzlement, whether or not you have been so inclined (cf. *ibid.*).<sup>433</sup> As one young woman told me, 'There is not much trust between us' (cf. Campbell 2000:192; Putnam 1993:167; Schuller et al. 2000:14-19). As a result, it can be difficult to find people willing to take on the responsibility of a *cargo*, as illustrated by the following anecdote.

As part of a well-guided effort to ensure that money does not go astray on its travels through a maze of intermediaries, and compatible with a mission to engage local people in participation by delegating some management tasks to the community level, all funds for *Vida's* projects are channelled directly to a bank account held by community stakeholders. The joint bank account must be opened in three names, to ensure accountability,<sup>434</sup> and while in previous projects account holders had included a local government representative and a parish priest, on this occasion it proved difficult to recruit willing participants from this demographic.<sup>435</sup> As such, *Vida* agreed to allow three people from the community to open the account. To encourage representative and democratic participation, *Vida* ruled that of these three, one would be a school parent, and one a woman. The community set about the task of electing the three representatives during the monthly *sindicato* meeting.

Electing the first man did not prove too difficult. Upon being elected amid much applause, the electee announced with a proud smile, 'I'm going to rob all the money!' The second proved a little more problematic, but one man accepted after realising it would mean he would be released from another, more time-consuming job. Electing a woman, however, proved much more difficult. This is not surprising if we recall from Chapter Three that women usually only attend *sindicato* meetings in representation of an absent man, and if elected to a leadership position, often have difficulty negotiating the balance of their responsibility as *dirigente* with their gender-specific obligations as wife and mother, both in the home and in the field. As each woman was nominated, she would respond firmly, 'I won't be able to,' giving the reason that she already had some sort of role in the community, or that she would need to travel and would therefore not be available to attend meetings.

---

<sup>433</sup> de Zutter (1994:71) writes of local 'promotores', 'The promoter begins to "compensate" his efforts looking for economic interest, to the cost of the project or to the cost of the other *campesinos*. And if he doesn't do it, in any case he is suspected of doing so.'

<sup>434</sup> As per bank rules, at least two of these people were required to be present for any transaction. This of course led to certain difficulties as it was rarely possible to coordinate two of the account holders to be in Chulumani at the same time when money needed to be withdrawn.

<sup>435</sup> Local people were none too keen to have a local government representative on the committee, although they did think that including a Priest was a good idea, the reason being, as stated above, 'There is not much trust between us.' It was thought that a person from outside the community may be able to mediate internal conflicts. However, when I visited one of the priests in Chulumani to ask if he would be willing to act as one of the account holders, he explained to me that if this were to be similar to other projects with the same NGO, the priests were only being asked to provide a signature and would have no real say in the development of the project. This was a type of nominal participation that did little more than to leave them open to criticism when projects were unsuccessful. Acting as a representative of the Church, and not as an individual, he would have to be careful to uphold the Church's image and, he went on to explain, he may be inclined to 'go off course' if pressured by the other two account holders to do so. Engaging my confidence with a complicit smile, he added, 'We are only human.'

Eventually one young woman was elected who, having no husband or children, was not quick enough to muster a credible excuse in the face of an increasingly agitated and hungry community at the end of a long day. Jhemima later came to visit me in a desperate state, explaining that this role would require her to stay in the community until the completion of the project, preventing her from travelling to the city to study as she had hoped. If I did not intervene, she said, 'They'll fine me. They'll cut my water off.' In a subsequent meeting which she was too afraid to attend, the community eventually decided to allow her to decline the role, the General Secretary telling the meeting, 'It seems to me that people like that are no good for the community' (see Chapter Three).<sup>436</sup>

Ironically, given that the NGOs clearly recognised a certain level of differentiation within the community, illustrated through the desire to engineer the participation of the presumably 'marginalised' women (Ribera 2003:35), the type of participation sought in this instance was one that denied the differential roles of individuals within the community, and within the coca production system (Arce and Long 2000:19; de Zutter 1994:83; Scott 1985), as well as the different accumulation of capital and power within the *field*. Jhemima had little symbolic capital since she was not well endowed with economic capital or social capital in the form of a husband and children, and thus any argument against taking on the role had little clout. Meanwhile, the older women had the capital behind them to be able to decline the role. Further, there was an assumption of homogeneity in that it was assumed that there would be no shortage of willing volunteers to make the personal sacrifices to themselves and their livelihood in taking on the extra work. This denied and was incompatible with local people's own often-times individualist visions of modernity, and of progress (cf. Alexander 1987; Arce and Long 2000; Durkheim 1984; Lash 1987; Parsons 1971; Seidman 1985; Weber 1964; 1987). By ignoring the realities of a political economy of coca, unwittingly, the project threatened this young girl's desires to become educated and to seek a life of ascension outside the coca *field*. The type of democracy being forged here was incompatible with local realities at this time and may in fact have led to greater disunity and antagonisms between community members (de Zutter 1994:82; Green 2002:67; Gumucio-Dagron 2001b:12).

### **Conclusion: Reconciling Development as the new Site of Struggle over Material and Cultural Resources**

Arce and Long (2000:23-24) have described the anthropology of development as 'concerning a field of contested realities in which struggles over values, resources, knowledge and images constitute the battlefield between different actors and their life-worlds.' This thesis has been an attempt to understand and address the power imbalances inherent in the relationships between

---

<sup>436</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three, she first asked to be sold a piece of land near the centre of the community in compensation for taking on the role, but was declined.

local people and development organisations: relationships that are representative of the historical insider-outsider relations founded upon struggles over the production and control of material and cultural resources. The hope is that learning to redress these imbalances might lead, as a by-product, to development projects that are more sustainable, necessary and compatible with people's social systems and ways of being.

Bearing in mind that it is of little use merely to critique (Blaikie 2000:1034-5), I have included as an appendix (see Appendix C), some practical recommendations as to how development organisations might communicate more effectively with local people, and implement their projects in ways that are compatible with the local communicative ecosystem. For now, I would like to suggest that organisations might go some way to achieving both the (material) aim of a useful development project and the (cultural) one of a more historically sensitive project, by recognising that each project site is incorporated into a communicative ecosystem founded on a material (in this case, coca) production system and on a political economy of both coca and (often coca-related) cultural production in the form of discourse, ideas, meanings, values and identities.

More than this, organisations might recognise that upon entering a locality, they are no longer *outside* the communicative ecosystem, nor are they outside the coca *field*, but are *outsiders inside* the ecosystem and the *field*. We might say that they are 'introduced organisms' who bring with them a habitus, and certain types of capital from outside, some of which is convertible and exchangeable inside the *field* (Bourdieu 1984; 1986). As they enter, they become engaged with local people as representatives of the historical outsiders and, usually unwittingly, play out the continuing battles over coca production, and the production of cultural (coca) discourses.

In material terms, for Yungas people, development organisations have a long history as players in the struggle over production of the coca leaf, as discussed in Chapter Two, so that while neither *Alma* nor *Vida* are interested in coca, they are nonetheless implicated. 'It's the same *chola* with a different *pollera*,' says Don Alonso, while my young and uninhibited neighbour says to me, 'The NGO sent you didn't they? Why do you take so many notes?' (cf. Arce and Long 2000:171). Cano (2001:4-5) writes of 'Alternative Development' projects aimed at coca eradication in the Andes, that the gravest consequences of the lack of participation afforded local communities and of the lack of understanding surrounding the local rationality, has been the people's loss of confidence in the State, in the International Community, and in alternative development policies.

In cultural terms, there has been a discourse production about local people that is constantly morphing, yet experienced as continuous, since the time they were described as 'brutish and loathsome' by Vespucci in 1504 (Vespucci 1926:17-18; 1894:25-26; see Chapter Two), through to the construction of coca growers as criminal narcotraffickers in the 1980s and beyond (Clawson and Rensaellaer 1996:132; U.S. Department of State 2001). Today, development organisations carry on the task of constructing homogenous populations steeped in ignorance and poverty

(Escobar, 1984:194; Foucault 1972:49). Carlos, recently elected into the local council as a member of ADEPCOCA, says of a proposed European Community (EC) Alternative Development project:

That's just going to be constructions of stone and cement. But I tell you that that too will fail, because what good is a *sindicato* headquarters to us, or a school, if we have no students to fill them? Roads as well, what do those things matter to us if we don't know how to think? The intention of those countries is that with those things, we will be content, that we will no longer think for ourselves... When the belly is full, the head is empty.

The result of such unequal and unreciprocal capital transfers, whereby one party is 'clearly superior to the other in his or her capacity to grant goods and services' (Wolf 2001:179), is a patron-client type relationship reminiscent of a time in the history of the Yungas that many would best forget. In *ex-hacienda* communities, Carlos tells me, 'Still today, if they see a white person like you, they shake with fear' (See Chapter Two). And when I tell unfortunate Jhemima that it is not my decision as to which community members are elected to open the project bank account, she says, 'But yes, it *is* your decision. They are scared of you; they'll listen to you' (cf. Moore 1993:124).<sup>437</sup>

Such discourses and relational positionings are able to be sustained due to, on the one hand, both a physical and a sociocultural distance between a three-tiered system of foreign donors, intermediary organisations and local people. Within this system, each tier possesses a different habitus and a different stock of capital (Bourdieu 1977:82) corresponding to their situation as 1) *blanco* (foreigner, upper-class) or Northern/Western (developed/rich), 2) *mestizo* (urban, upper-middle class) or Southern and urban (developing/middle-class) and 3) *campesino/indigena* (rural, lower class) or Southern and rural (developing/poor). On the other hand, the discourses are sustained through a conspiracy of reinforced misconception (Crisell 1986:197; Schramm and Roberts 1971), whereby local people to some extent internalise the discourses being enacted about them (Escobar, 1984:194; Foucault 1972:49) and consent to the cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971:12) ('...but it *is* your decision'), and to some extent strategically perform the myths where it is in their interests to do so (Arce and Long 2000:19) ('They like us to be united, don't they?').

The two types of distance have meant two things. Firstly, such physical distance requires elaborate mechanisms, including strategic use of information and communication technologies, to be managed (Skuse and Cousins 2007). In this case it was badly managed due to, on the one hand, the nature of the physical distance itself and the inadequacies of the available ICTs with which to manage it, and on the other, due to a disregard for the existing communicative ecosystem. As a consequence of the sociocultural distance, the NGOs forged their own communicative paths instead of using pre-existing ones compatible with the coca production system. The communicative

---

<sup>437</sup> Parallels can be drawn with Lisa Moore's (1993:124) experience in Thailand, where she was assumed to have power and an 'in' with the American Embassy because she was white. This perception itself endows her and me with a level of symbolic capital that does amount to power.



difficulties led to a mainly unidirectional and non-dialogic communication between the different tiers.

Secondly, while the organisations have been concentrating on a move away from the technocratic approaches that were a mark of modernisation theses of development as progress (Huntington 1968; Rogers 1962; 1971; Rostow 1971) to focus on a development that is more participatory and pays more attention to local knowledges and local social systems (Freire 1972; Hobart 1993; van der Ploeg 1993), they have failed to notice what was happening on the ground. They have failed to notice the sometimes creative, sometimes merely responsive versions of modernity and of participation that local people themselves have been forging, and through which they seek a certain 'progress' and a certain 'education' that is negotiated, not always successfully, between community and individuality (Arce and Long 2000; de Zutter 1994). They have failed to notice the much wider civic participation that local Yungas people have been forging in a wider political and economic ecosystem (cf. Conzelman 2007; Hickey and Mohan 2005:237), made possible in large part by their relatively strong position as a group within the coca production relations. ('Coca is the only tool we have left', said one *dirigente* as a group of them discussed the gas and North American immunity in Bolivia [cf. Arce and Long 2000:169]). And finally, they have missed the significance of the new Mayor, at his important table, making the most of the newly available participatory mechanisms with which he may develop himself and his own version of the Yungas 'community'.

## 8 CONCLUSION: NEW BEGINNINGS

NOTE: This figure is included on page 289 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

**FIGURE 31: Homework time in a Yungas community.**  
(Photo by author, March 2005).



I'm going to die soon. The solution is in the children – with their studies, something will come up, they'll figure something out. They'll eat something a bit better. They'll go to the city.

(Aurelia, coca grower and mother of twelve, Chulumani sector)

In the contemporary confusion and doubt, however, an alternative imaginary of development can, and in my view should, lead to reflection about what the audience as well as the author can actually do about it.

(Blaikie 2000: 1035)

## Remembering the Thesis: Aims and Contributions

Remember eight-year-old Warita, who arrived in the Yungas with her head hanging out of a bus, feasting upon the splendid, hopeful sights of Yungas greenery? She is twelve now (it surprised me too), and will soon conquer the world, if she or her parents have anything to do with it. Time does not stand still. Nor do children, and the world is opening up to them now in new ways that neither Pizarro nor Freire nor perhaps even Bill Gates could have envisaged. The thesis I will assume you have just read, was inspired by feelings of guilt associated with 'white privilege' (McIntosh 1989), and also somewhat paradoxically by a 'secular missionary zeal'<sup>438</sup> to save the world with only anthropology. It will not do this, of course, but perhaps it will contribute in some small way to the vast, old and thankfully constantly morphing debates on how the various parties involved in 'development' may think about and work toward addressing and redressing historical power imbalances as they are played out and reproduced in the interactions that occur in the day to day of intentional 'development'. These debates go hand in hand with the ones that worry about the less macro issues of project practicality and about how theorists and practitioners (terms which ought to include local people as much as they include 'experts') can work toward a 'development' that is more relevant and more compatible with local people's everyday lives, and with the futures and modernities that they imagine and strive to create for themselves (Arce and Long 2000:6; Bebbington 2000; Blaikie 2000:1037; Long 1992; 2001).

By way of contributing to these debates, this thesis has advocated the adoption of a political economic communicative ecology approach to understanding the ways in which communicative interaction (by its very nature, social) is structured, guided and limited by an interconnectedness and interdependence of people and media technologies, imbued with the power imbalances, inclusions and exclusions that are the product of and that reproduce relations of both material and cultural production, exchange and consumption (Altheide 1994; Hearn and Foth 2007a; Nair et al. 2006; Slater and Tacchi 2004; Tacchi et al. 2003a). Such an understanding, it is argued, will enhance the relevance and compatibility that any new communications for development intervention will have for the lives of those inhabiting such a complex ecosystem, and will facilitate understandings of issues of access (geographical, social, cultural, economic) and motivation for media use. The merit of bringing these two concepts together is highlighted in the case at hand, since we are dealing with a particular locality that is largely monoproducing, so that its inhabitants are without exception linked both *materially*, through the production, exchange and consumption of coca, and *culturally*, through the discourses and the symbolism that surround coca and those who produce, consume or live by it. It is through the practices and processes involved with coca production (land ownership, labour exchange, coca *sindicato* organisation), coca exchange (and associated travel and interaction) and coca consumption (the sharing of a bodily, social, spiritual

---

<sup>438</sup> I borrow the term from Deane Fergie, who borrowed it from Nic Peterson. Fergie remembers Peterson using the term to refer to the aspirations of most anthropologists during a presentation in the mid-1970s (personal communication with Fergie).

and symbolic practice), that social and communicational articulation takes place (cf. Mintz 1959; 1985). The ecosystem of coca communications, as I have called it, is therefore inseparable as a concept from the coca production system and the relations inherent in it.

I have used Bourdieu's (1984; 1986; 1990) notions of field, capital and habitus to describe people's and groups' relative and shifting positionings within this ecosystem as they accumulate or lose capital and as they retain or alter, within objective boundaries, the dispositions and perceived life possibilities that are the legacy of the historical conditionings in which their habitus came to be (Bourdieu 1990:56). The material and cultural dimensions of the ecosystem are conflated and expressed in the notion of the coca *field*, where a field describes a network of relations between positions (Bourdieu 1993:30; cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:97) that is characterised by struggle, in this case over both coca production and the production of cultural products or discourse that gravitate around the coca production system and the coca leaf. People may alter their positionings within the *field* through the accumulation of capital, meaning land ownership (economic capital), social and labour networks and organisational participation (social capital), knowledge and skills, including language and verbal skills (cultural capital) and by translating these economically-based assets into symbolic capital and therefore power through the skillful misrepresentation of economic capital as disinterested generosity (Bourdieu 1990:112). It is in these capital accumulations and conversions that people's agency and potential for strategic social mobility within the ecosystem lies.

A function of the habitus of all Yungueños, which finds its origin in the Spanish conquest, is an endorsement of the three 'thought categories' (Barnes 1954:45) that define individuals by the interchangeable notions of labour, class and ethnicity, where agriculturalists are lower-class and indigenous (*campesinos*), and non-agriculturalists are middle or upper-class and *mestizo* or *blanco* (cf. Rivera 1994; Spedding 1994). As people adopt new labour practices, they also shift their class and ethnic categorisations, and adapt their practices to align them with their new conditions, within the confines of their objective habitus (Bourdieu 1977:78). Both capital and habitus conspire within the field to weigh heavily on a person's or group's potential to access the various communicative media that form a part of the communicative ecosystem, and to use these in a way that will allow them to protect their livelihood (du Toit et al. 2007; Horst and Miller 2006; Skuse and Cousins 2007), to accumulate further capital and to contribute to the production of culture and discourse by influencing public opinion (Alfaro 2006b; Forde et al. 2002; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006; Martín-Barbero 2006). Different media are variously accessible and relevant to different people by virtue of a coalescing between the people's positions within the coca *field* (whether coca producer or non-producer, whether landed, well networked and so on), the technological nature of the medium in question (Altheide 1994:674; Spitulnik 2002:338), and if applicable, the way in which the communications for development project was implemented by the development organisation (Gumucio-Dagron 2004a; Tacchi et al. 2003a). Six properties of the media were identified as bearing upon access and use:



- 1) Spatial positioning requirements, referring to the physical distance a potential listener or communicator must travel in order to listen or communicate
- 2) Communicative or sensory requirements, referring to whether the medium requires oral, aural or visual communication, writing or reading. These first two criteria converge to determine whether or not the medium demands foregrounding (exclusive attention from the listener/viewer/communicator) or may be backgrounded (used in conjunction with other tasks or activities).
- 3) Economic capital requirements, referring to the immediate and long-term economic investment a potential communicator must make in order to use the medium
- 4) Direction of information flow, referring to whether information is in-coming or out-going and whether there is capacity for dialogic communication
- 5) Whether the medium has capacity for narrowcasting (directing a message to a specific or limited audience) or broadcasting (widely disseminating a message)
- 6) Whether messages are transmitted immediately via the medium, or with a time-delay

An analysis of the different media employed by a cross-section of people in the Yungas told that use of the different media was differentiated most obviously along the 'thought lines' of labour, and therefore class and ethnicity, as well as more subtly within these groups according to the capital possessed by the individual members. Non-producers are likely to use the telephone (and Internet for a select group), for maintaining contact with their existing social networks with the aim of fulfilling emotional needs as well as the practical everyday needs of organising remittances or labour (cf. Baym 2002; Horst and Miller 2006; Skuse and Cousins 2007). For accessing information from beyond immediate social networks, they make use of the television and to a lesser extent, newspaper. Coca producers, on the other hand, employ Radio Yungas for both of these goals, coupled with a high level of face-to-face communication, often made possible by travel in the cases of people who are better situated economically and therefore travel regularly for trade.

The reasons for this differentiation between *campo* and *pueblo* become clear when considering the six criteria for access outlined above. Most obviously, townfolk are better physically able to access the media of telephone and Internet than the coca producers because these media are situated, more prevalently in the case of telephone and exclusively in the case of the Internet, in the town (cf. IICD 2005:59). Beyond face-to-face communication, these two media might be said to create the optimum scenario for achieving direct interpersonal communication with a family member, since they both enable dialogic narrowcasting. Within the ranks of non-producers however, access differentiation exists between the two media, the latter being restricted to those who already have

the background literacy skills as well as the time and willingness to gain the further technical skills required to use the Internet (cf. IICD 2005:59; Kellner 2002). These are school students from relatively well-off families, who are joined by those students from the *campo* whose families are economically situated such that they are able to forego the young person's labour during term-time in order to send them to study in town.

Further, for accessing geographically and socially distant information networks, townsfolk are more likely to be able to spend time watching the television, since much of their daily labour tasks (such as shop-keeping) are sedentary and permit a high level of foregrounding, which the television demands. The radio, on the other hand, and in particular Radio Yungas, most adequately fulfils the communication needs of coca producers for accessing both immediate and broader social networks. For the listener, it is portable and aural, which is instrumental in that it permits the medium to be backgrounded to daily labour tasks (cf. Crisell 1986:215; Spitulink 2002:339; Tacchi 1998:27). It is also inexpensive to use, and provides information that is locally and agriculturally relevant (cf. Gumucio-Dagron 2004a:6). For the communicator, the *cajita* system makes this an accessible medium for those wishing to 'false narrowcast' a message to a specific recipient (cf. Becker 2006; Hirst and Harrison 2007; Naficy 1998; Sterne 2005), and radio retains the speech aspect of intimate face-to-face communication (Ricoeur 1991). While some people find intimidating the fact that the 'false narrowcast' is actually a public broadcast, the advantage is that with so many ears, the chances that the message will be passed on to eventually reach the intended recipient are high.

It is, however, the potential to allow local people to broadcast messages to a wide listenership that sets the medium of Radio Yungas apart from any other within the communicative ecosystem. In this, beyond being bi-directional or 'two-sided' (Brecht 2006:2; Contreras Baspineiro 2000b), I suggest that the medium is multidirectional. Information flow is not restricted to a two-way conversation between radio (Chulumani) and listener (geographically undefined amorphous mass) (cf. Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955:16; Lerner 1958; 1967; Morley 1992:45; Pasquali 2006; Schramm 1967), nor is it restricted to a bi-directional journey between the Yungas and the wider communicative ecosystem of which the ecosystem of coca communications is a part (Appadurai 1996:41; Castells 1996; 2004; Lash 2002). Surely this occurs, as national and international news flows in to the Yungas from outside, and as information travels outward occasionally when a live hook-up is arranged with a La Paz-based radio. At such times, Yungueños speak, in the words of one presenter, 'from the Yungas of La Paz, for the country and the world!' But information also travels simultaneously from one community to another, from a community to a town and vice versa, and when a *dirigente* from Wawa Kuka engages in dialogic communication with a radio presenter in Chulumani, he or she appeals at the same time to the sympathies of thousands of people across a wide region.

The radio's unique potential for participatory broadcasting permits certain actors within the coca *field* to become active in the public sphere with the aim of influencing the opinions of their fellow Yungueños and altering or maintaining the dominant discourse (Alfaro 2006b; Habermas 1989; Martín-Barbero 2006). These people tend to be coca grower *dirigentes*, since it is they who are in possession of the sufficient capital in its various guises to access the medium and to wield the authority to use it for certain ends. Part of the work that they do, together with Radio Yungas staff and administrators, is the creation of a 'Radio Yungas family', an 'imagined community' of listeners that is not just any community, but an expressly *cocalero* and Yungueño community, constructed as such through the way in which listeners are addressed, and through the content that is aimed at an agriculturally-oriented listenership. But although this family excludes non-coca growers from its daily operations, the radio nonetheless has the capacity to bring disparate groups together, if not in harmony, then at least with a common wider agenda and a common point of departure for broad discussion. This occurs at those times when all members of the coca *field* - producers and non-producers, MNR and MAS, inhabitants of traditional and colonisation zones - are united in the material and cultural struggles that are played out with outsiders over coca and over those who owe their livelihood to coca (Featherstone 1995:112; Huesca 1995:160).

By virtue of its multi-directionality and its compatibility with the coca production system, resultant in its wide accessibility and relevance to many Yungueños, Radio Yungas becomes the medium that is most in harmony with the ecosystem of coca communications. It is able to fulfil this important role because of its technological properties, because of the relative control that coca growers enjoy over the mode of coca production and the economic surplus that they are able to inject into the radio (cf. Gramsci 1971:12; Wolf 1982:390), and finally because of the intentions and vision of those who founded the radio and of those who continue to administrate and operate it. This rests in stark contrast to the Internet telecentre project studied, which despite having been sold to donors on the premise that it would 'strengthen and defend the voices of indigenous groups, women's groups, *campesinos*, youths and other marginalised and exploited sectors' (Ribera 2003:35), was used by only a select group who fulfilled the necessary criteria – geographical, economic, skills-based, and in terms of relevance – for Internet use. The 'digital divide' then could be said to run along the 'thought lines' of labour, class and ethnicity and to be widening along these lines, just as it narrows between city folk and well-to-do townfolk (cf. Gigler 2001:37; Martín-Barbero 2006:919; Rice 2002:106; Skuse and Cousins 2007:188). Instead of waiting for the divide to narrow, people try to jump across it as they send their children to the town or to the city to pursue a career and a life outside of the coca *field*, climbing as they do the ladders of class and ethnic 'thought categorisation'.

Aside from the technological properties of the medium discussed above, much of this exclusivity can be owed to the practicalities of project implementation. In the final chapter of the thesis, I described a three-tiered system which includes local people as poor, 'under-developed', rural and indigenous, intermediary organisations as upper-middle class, urban and *mestizo*, and donor

organisations as upper-class, white foreigners (outsiders) from 'developed' countries. I wrote that these tiers are separated by both physical and social distance (Bourdieu 1977:82), distances that facilitate the maintenance of a 'development discourse' that constructs local people as poor, ignorant, and homogenous in these shared conditions (Escobar 1984; 1995; Esteva 1992; Ferguson 1994; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Hobart 1993; Sachs 1992). A 'misconception conspiracy' is also able to be maintained whereby local people partly internalise the discourse that is being enacted about them (Escobar 1984:194; Foucault 1972:49), and partly strategically perform it in order to maintain the conspiracy and allow the development apparatus to continue functioning so that the money will continue to be forthcoming (Arce and Long 2000:19). The other two tiers help to reproduce the discourse by submitting to the processes of 'reinforcement theory', whereby audiences only take on board that which they already believe (Crisell 1986:197; Schramm and Roberts 1971).

What is damaging about this is that, not only does it lead to a myopia as far as the complexities of the local social structure are concerned, and therefore minimises the probability that communication interventions will be compatible with and useful to the daily lives of local people, but it also amounts to a reproduction of what local people consider to be the historical inequalities that have characterised insider-outsider relations for the past 500 years. For Yungas people, it was with the arrival of the Spanish that a rupture occurred between a time of social justice and plenty under Incan administration, and a time of domination and exploitation that continues to the present day (Gill 2000:54; Harris 1995:110-1; Spedding 1996:26). The dominators changed guards periodically - first the Spanish conquistadors, then the ruling elite of the Republic, then the international community, in particular the United States - but the experience remained constant. These relationships of inequality were and continue to be experienced as power struggles over the control of the material and cultural aspects of coca and coca growers, and the latest *outsiders* to enter this *field* are the development organisations and practitioners who carry on these struggles, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unwittingly. In material terms, development organisations have become tainted by the 'alternative development' work undertaken by government organisations and NGOs with the express aim of substituting coca with other crops (Arce and Long 2000:171; Cano 2001:4-5). In cultural terms, while people were called 'brutish and loathsome' by the conquistadors, (Vespucci 1926:17-18) and later criminal, violent and 'not socially valuable' by the United States and the wider international community (Clawson and Rensellaer 1996:132; U.S. Department of State 2001; Yungas Community Development Fund n.d.), they are now constructed as poor and ignorant, although the latter is, of course, never stated in such crude terminology (Escobar, 1984:194).<sup>439</sup>

These discourses are enacted and reproduced in the day-to-day of development practice, the different actors unable or unwilling to escape their designated roles. On a busy Saturday morning

---

<sup>439</sup> A report by the Yungas Community Development Fund (n.d), a project funded by USAID, wrote that their aim for the project was to encourage people to 'voluntarily change from coca production to more socially valuable activities.'

in Chulumani, I was stopped by the School Director from one of the communities with which I was working. He introduced me to a *dirigente* from a neighbouring community, who was seeking funding for a computer for his school. As we sipped soft drink in one of the market's *pensiones*, the Director told me several times that this *dirigente* was a very important man. I did not doubt it, and felt sufficiently inferior and apprehensive, as is to be expected with any new meeting. However, as the conversation progressed, and the man spoke softly and timidly if at all, I came to realise that the Director was not trying to cow me, but that he was trying to instil confidence in the *dirigente*, and convince him that he was in fact important. It was both a revelation and a source of great sadness when it dawned on me: '*He's scared of me!*' That an important man with no doubt years of leadership experience should feel intimidated by a student seemed unfair. But this is deep-seated and has been allowed to continue, not least because it makes things easier for the development workers who must achieve certain prescribed goals and report back to their superiors on these achievements within a strict time-frame (cf. Bliakie 2000:1044).

If we are really interested in witnessing changes of the type embedded in the notions of 'participation' and 'empowerment' in their most idealist and broadest forms, development organisations and workers need to be aware of where they are situated and what they represent, socially and historically, and to try to shift the balance of power, subtly, and every day. Organisations can seek to better understand the social structure by enlisting ethnographic methodologies to do so, and by considering themselves to have become a part of a locally entrenched, although constantly changing, communicative ecosystem; a system that is inextricably tied to a local production system while also being connected to wider social, political and communicative systems beyond the locality, and that functions according to a set of power relations that enable, restrict and exclude. As Arce and Long (2000:8) write, ethnography finds its strength in 'fully acknowledging the "battlefields" of knowledge and power wherein a multiplicity of actors engage in struggles over the meanings and practicalities of livelihoods, values and organising processes.' In the case at hand, organisations must respect the coca leaf as the axis of Yungas society, economy and politics, and the focal point of those 'battlefields', and shift their thinking from 'alternative development' toward the *desarrollo con coca* ('development with coca') that is being advocated in Bolivia today (cf. Spedding 2004).

### **So What Happens Now? Is This the End?**

This thesis captured only a moment in the long history that continues to be written daily. Since I abandoned the field, factories to manufacture coca-derived products have been reopened in Coripata and Chulumani with funding from Venezuela (La Razón 2006b; cf. Conzelman 2007:290), and Morales has vowed to negotiate the legalisation of coca exportation to neighbouring Argentina (La Razón 2006b). Morales' administration has changed coca laws so that families in areas where

coca was previously considered illegal are now able to grow one *cato* (a 40 by 40m plot of land) of coca each (La Razón 2006a), and licensed coca growers can now sell their produce directly to consumers, rather than being restricted to sale in what were previously the only legal coca markets (Conzelman 2007:289-90; La Razón 2006b; 2006c). While the abolition of the delimitation between traditional, transitional and illegal zones has in some ways meant less security for Chulumani coca growers, who no longer have any special legal status in regard to the production of coca for traditional markets (cf. Conzelman 2007:291-2; La Razón 2006d), it is nonetheless in some ways a welcome change to be able to widen their scope for trade. My brother-in-law now travels between the Yungas and Santa Cruz to sell coca, and reports that the business is going well. And what is more, he is able to contact people in the Yungas through the use of mobile phones.

That the world is not yet so small is evidenced by the fact that I have had been unable to maintain much contact with the people of the Yungas whilst compiling this thesis, and therefore cannot comment on how these vast changes are being experienced by local people. I would suggest that there is much scope for future research in trying to understand the use of new media such as mobile phones and Internet in an area where radio has been until the last year or so the only way to contact people, and in assessing how these become a part of or alter the communicative ecology. These technological changes, coupled with the political and economic upheavals that are occurring in the country, set the stage for an ethnography that is poised to pinpoint and explore instrumental moments of change in not just Bolivia's, but in world history, and to ask serious questions about the role of 'development' in all of this.

And so I imagine Warita, twelve years old, looking out across a green valley and to the snowy peaks beyond, where that other life lies. Does she still want to be a lawyer? What will her chances be? I see Benjamin and Carola, rounding up the younger children for their meal. They have forged some sort of a life for themselves and their family, and balance precariously, as they have always done, on an uncertain future. I wonder too about the woman on the plane, who wanted to teach the 'Indians' to love. What does she think of all this? And how would she feel if Warita one day stood up to defend her in court? It has been a long road for me to understand that I cannot blame her, for she is a product of her history just like everyone else. As inhabitants of this vast world, connected to the most distant lands through the sale of their goods, through the exchange of information, through the messages they send when they vote for a President or march in the streets, and connected through a shared global history that is all of ours, people do what they can to achieve their everyday goals and fulfil their most hopeless dreams. They use the resources available to them to manoeuvre within the boundaries of their predicament, and if development has a purpose, it should be to make available resources that may contribute to the realisation of those hopeless dreams.